

PhAETHON



Ev COCHRANE

Phaethon

The Star That Fell From Heaven



By Ev Cochrane

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Special Edition

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For more than two Astrological Ages mankind has suffered
from an Engrammatic blockage in the Collective Memory
due to the repeated electro-shocks received by
our local Logos of the Earth who has appeared to us
and presented His name as El Shaddai, Lord of the Mountain.

Mankind exists within the Body of El Shaddai
and just as trauma causes psychic inversion in men
and a split-off component of the Self called the Shadow
which is perceived as the Other and even Enemy,
so too the concatenation of survival strategems that arose
from El Shaddai's Shadow Self
have brought down to our present day groups and
secret societies who labor to reconstruct the Lost Past
and appease and serve what they perceive as a
dark, diabolical, punishing capricious "Lord"
which in truth is the Shadow version of our Good Lord
and God Star, our Homeworld origin
to whom the Ladder of Jacob and Antahkarana was broken,
Our Loving Womb Father SATURN

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I welcome this chance to offer a personal note of thanks to my old comrade and fellow traveler in what amounts to a life-long quest to solve the Great Riddle that is mythological exegesis.

Preface

“This myth [Phaethon’s], at its core, recapitulates virtually everything that is essential to know about the ancient Greek hero.”¹

“Myth seems to lend itself particularly well to the phenomena of astronomy, the most ancient and sacred of the sciences.”²

Phaethon’s incendiary joyride in his father’s chariot—followed by his spectacular fall from the celestial heights—has captivated countless generations of Earthlings ever since it was first set to poetry by the likes of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Ovid. The origins of the story, or how it is to be explained from the standpoint of natural science, remain a subject of seemingly endless speculation and controversy. The present monograph intends to reopen the question over origins by offering a cross-cultural analysis of the Phaethon-theme.

Like a Siren’s call from a distant time and wholly foreign world, the testimony of ancient myth continues to exert a strange fascination over modern man. Whence derives the power of myth to inspire great art and move the emotions? The question most germane to the present inquiry, perhaps, is the following: Why should anyone take an interest in the astronomical details encoded in ancient myth?

For countless generations before the origin of advanced civilization, myth served as the primary medium for recording and communicating mankind’s most basic and cherished beliefs regarding the history of the world and the nature of the cosmos. During this immense span of time every tribal community had, as it were, its own Homer or Hesiod who, reciting from an iron-clad memory, “sang” or otherwise recounted the local account of Creation. It is in this sense, then, that ancient myth represents a mnemonic treasure trove documenting the intellectual history of our forebears and, as such, it forms a rich vein of study for all serious students of human psychology, religion, and natural philosophy. And if it should also prove to be the case that ancient myth preserves important information regarding the recent history of Earth and the

¹ G. Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 571.

² J. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought* (Albany, 1993), p. 45.

ambient solar system—our primary thesis in four previous volumes—its study becomes all the more essential and rewarding.

The advent of civilization had a profound influence on the precise means and manner by which the archaic myths were transmitted. With the development of writing and other graphic systems capable of preserving sacred traditions, storytellers gradually ceased to perform such a vital function in their rapidly evolving cultures. The great myths, hitherto committed to memory and transmitted orally from one generation to the next, now became the common possession of anyone who could read and had access to the requisite texts. At the same time, the sacred traditions became increasingly susceptible to the vicissitudes of cultural evolution and the corresponding modifications that inevitably arise from the attempt to historicize and localize the events in question. Despite the great care with which the ancient manuscripts were copied, errors gradually crept in over the centuries. As memories faded, and as sacred traditions became subject to ever-increasing adaptation and abridgement, the ancient scribes struggled to understand the message that had been bequeathed to them by their ancestors. Thus it is that, for the past several thousand years, scholars and like-minded exegetes have sought to deduce and recover the basic message of the *Iliad*, the *Rig Veda*, the *Torah*, and the *Pyramid Texts*, albeit with mixed results.

From this author's vantage point it is extremely unlikely that a valid reconstruction of the mythological testimony will ever result from the study of any one particular cultural tradition or literary record. Rather, a better strategy would be to compare the different cultural traditions and attempt to reconstruct common thematic patterns—those telling of a Deluge, dragon-combat, or *hieros gamos*, for example. Should any such recurring thematic patterns be found—and such patterns abound, in fact—this would naturally increase our confidence in the fundamental veracity and informational content of the respective mytho-historical records.

How, then, are we to explain the recurring thematic patterns in the mytho-historical record? It is our opinion that this question is best addressed by subjecting the different reconstructed patterns to rigorous analysis and then cross-checking the results against the evidence of the physical sciences in order to form a working hypothesis regarding the probable natural history behind the

respective mythological traditions. This strategy, in fact, has long formed the cornerstone of the mytho-historical analysis practiced by this author.

Until recently, the study of ancient myth has been given short shrift by modern scholars in general and all but ignored by mainstream science. The present book is an attempt to reinstate the importance of mythology as a reliable witness to ancient history. It is our view that the key to reconstructing the history of the world and the fundamental meaning of the central themes of myth and religion has always been right before our eyes. Yet for one reason or another, historians and scholars have been inclined to ignore it.

Chapter One

The Story of Phaethon

“At his fall the heavens are confounded. Look! Night is driving Day from the noonday sky, and the sun’s orb as it plunges toward the earth draws in its train the stars.”³

“There was tumult in the sky shaking the joints of the immovable universe; the very axle bent which runs through the middle of the revolving heavens. Libyan Atlas could hardly support the self-rolling firmament of stars, as he rested on his knees with bowed back under this greater burden.”⁴

“A connection between this myth, interpreted as a cosmic conflagration from an early stage (Plato *Timaeus* 22c-d), and celestial bodies plummeting from outer space must remain hypothetical.”⁵

Phaethon’s exploits are famously summarized in Plato’s all-too-brief account in the *Timaeus*. There the speaker is one Critias who, in turn, claims to have received his information from Solon, the latter renowned for his wisdom. A dear friend of Critias’s great-grandfather, Solon is said to have learned of the tale in Egypt:

“There have been and there will be many and diverse destructions of mankind, of which the greatest are by fire and water, and lesser ones by countless other means. For in truth the story that is told in your country as well as ours, how once upon a time Phaethon, son of Helios, yoked his father’s chariot, and, because he was unable to drive it along the course taken by his father, burnt up all that was upon the earth and himself perished by a thunderbolt—that story, as it is told, has the fashion of legend, but the truth of it lies in the occurrence of a shifting of the bodies in heaven which move around the earth, and a destruction of the things on the earth by fierce fire, which recurs at long intervals.”⁶

³ Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.11.2 as translated in G. Ferrari, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁴ Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 38.350ff as translated by L. Lind, *Nonnos Dionysiaca*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 116-121.

⁵ T. Heinze, “Phaëthon,” in H. Cancik & H. Schneider eds., *Brill’s New Pauly* 10 (Leiden, 2007), col. 905.

⁶ *Timaeus* 22c-d.

It will be noted that the global catastrophe commemorated in the story of Phaethon is attributed to a “shifting of the bodies in heaven,” an apparent reference to the disturbance or dramatic fall of one or more celestial bodies.⁷

In addition to Plato, other ancient authors also made Phaethon the focal point of their literary works. Aeschylus (*Heliades*), Euripides (*Phaethon*), and Theodorides (*Phaethon*) all produced tragedies devoted to a hero named Phaethon. Sadly, these works are known to us only in fragments and hence have given rise to widely different reconstructions.⁸

Of all the ancient works recounting the myth of Phaethon, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is certainly the most familiar and fleshed out. Indeed, Ovid’s poem has been called “by far the most important and influential of all Latin mythographical texts, the richest and most memorable single source of Greek myth for the Roman, medieval, and Renaissance worlds.”⁹ Although it stands to reason that Ovid modeled his narrative on earlier Greek accounts, the specific sources that he employed—apart from Euripides (circa 420 BCE)—remain largely unknown.¹⁰ Writing in the first decade of the common era, Ovid offered a more elaborate and, one would suspect, embellished version of the ancient story. The basic outlines of Ovid’s tale are well-known. The son of Clymene, upon learning that his true father is Helios, sets off to claim his divine destiny. After reaching heaven, Phaethon demands to drive the solar chariot despite the warnings of his father, who knows full well just how difficult it is to handle the powerful team of horses who labor to usher in the day. An excerpt from the *Metamorphoses* follows:

“But the lad has already mounted the light chariot, and, standing proudly, takes the light reins with joy into his hands, and thanks his unwilling father for the gift...And, as curved ships, without their proper ballast, roll in the waves, and, unstable because too light, are borne out of their course, so the chariot, without its accustomed burden, gives leaps into the air, is tossed aloft and is like a riderless car. When they feel this, the team run wild and leave the well-beaten track,

⁷ For a recent discussion of the evidence, see M. A. van der Sluijs, “Phaethon and the Great Year,” *Apeiron* 39:1 (2006), pp. 85-86.

⁸ The best discussion of the evidence is J. Diggle, *Euripides: Phaethon* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 4-32. See also C. Collard, M. Cropp & K. Lee eds., *Euripides: Selected Fragmentary Plays, Vol. I* (Warminster, 1995), pp. 195-239.

⁹ A. Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* (Oxford, 2004), p. 311.

¹⁰ J. Diggle, *Euripides: Phaethon* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 8.

and fare no longer in the same course as before. The driver is panic-stricken...Dazed, he knows not what to do...When the horses feel these [the fallen reins] lying on their backs, they break loose from their course...Now they climb up to the top of heaven, and now, plunging headlong down, they course along nearer the earth...The earth bursts into flame...Great cities perish with their walls, and the vast conflagration reduces whole nations to ashes...But the Almighty Father [Zeus], calling on the gods to witness and him above all who had given the chariot, that unless he bring aid all things will perish by a grievous doom, mounts on high to the top of heaven...whence he stirs his thunders and flings his hurtling bolts...He thundered, and balancing in his right hand a bolt, flung it from beside the ear at the charioteer and hurled him from the car and from life as well, and thus quenched fire with blasting fire. The maddened horses leap apart, wrench their necks from the yoke, and break away from the parted reins. Here lie the reins, there the axle torn from the pole...But Phaëthon, fire ravaging his ruddy hair, is hurled headlong and falls with a long trail through the air; as sometimes a star from the clear heavens, although it does not fall, still seems to fall.”¹¹

Interpretations abound as for how we are to understand Phaethon’s catastrophic fall from heaven. Among Classicists it has long been something of a consensus that the myth of Phaethon commemorates the setting of the sun. This view can be traced back well into the last century, where it was popularized by Carl Robert, among others.¹² A solar aetiology of the myth is still fashionable in some circles, as witnessed by the recent remarks of Jon Solomon:

“From these and other numerous mythological representations we can see that the setting of the sun had at some period been considered to be of the greatest and widespread importance. The Phaethon myth is perhaps the most obvious example, for it describes a mortal offspring of the sun god unsuccessfully attempting to borrow the solar chariot and crashing it to earth—in the West, of course...Phaethon, a mortal hypostasis of the immortal Helios, crashes the solar chariot once, but in an eternal return the event is geophysically repeated on a daily basis.”¹³

¹¹ *Metamorphoses*, Book II, lines 150-322 as translated by F. Miller (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 71-83.

¹² C. Robert, “Die Phaethonsage bei Hesiod,” *Hermes* 18 (1883), pp. 434-441.

¹³ J. Solomon, “Apollo and the Lyre,” in J. Solomon ed., *Apollo* (Tucson, 1994), p. 41.

In an important article published in 1883, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff argued that Phaethon was to be identified with the planet Venus.¹⁴ Having first gained a measure of fame for his venomous critique of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, Wilamowitz claimed that Hesiod's *Theogony* (989ff.) provided some basis for believing that Phaethon was catasterized as a star alongside Venus, thereby supporting the opinion of Hellenistic astronomers such as Hyginus: "Das alte Naturmärchen konnte einfach erzählen, Aphrodite nimmt sich den Jüngling den sie liebt, und lässt ihn zum Sterne werden."¹⁵

Georg Knaack, whose article in Roscher's *Lexikon* stands as the most authoritative treatment of the myth to date, also identified Phaethon with Venus.¹⁶

The astronomer Edwin Krupp has been described as "one of the world's greatest experts on archaeoastronomy" and is the author of several popular books on the intersection of astronomy and ancient myth.¹⁷ After a lifetime of observing the stars and pondering the astronomical content of ancient myth, Krupp wavered as to the celestial determinants of the Phaethon myth:

"The myth of Phaëthon could represent any of the several celestial phenomena. Perhaps Venus, whose path crosses to either side of the sun and is in some ways erratic, is intended by allegory. Or perhaps some dramatic, unexpected, and unwelcome cosmic visitor inspired the myth. A comet may seem wayward and unsettling. Some evidence in the myth implies that the story concerns the order of the year and the fear that the sun might abandon its normal path, an anxiety akin to the notion that in December the sun threatens just to continue its way south and maroon the world in winter. Although the chariot's departure with Phaëthon was styled as a sunrise in the sun's daily course, the sun's annual motion on the ecliptic may be the story's real core. Helios advised Phaëthon the road would pass by the Bull, the Archer, the Lion, the Scorpion, and the Crab. These constellations define the better part of the zodiac, territory the sun would never encounter in but one day's travels.

¹⁴ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, "Phaethon," *Hermes* 18 (1883), pp. 396-434.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

¹⁶ G. Knaack, "Phaëthon," in W. Roscher ed., *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, Vol. III:2 (Leipzig, 1884-1937), cols. 2175-2195.

¹⁷ Quoted from the back cover of *Echoes of the Ancient Skies*.

There is a cosmic theme here: the challenge to world order...Despite threat of storm or eclipse, the sun—holding to its steady courses, its predictable cycle—measured out the world's order in time and space. No more vivid image of the peril of chaos could be contrived than the chariot of the sun out of control.”¹⁸

Remarkably, after several paragraphs of equally astute analysis, Krupp explains the myth of Phaethon as reflecting either the familiar movements of Venus or the dramatic appearance of a wayward comet or, perhaps, the sun moving along the ecliptic over the course of the year. Such are the lessons to be learned from “one of the world's greatest experts on archaeoastronomy”!

All of the scholars cited thus far would explain the Phaethon-myth by reference to the familiar solar system—as an allegory of the sunset or Venus's disappearance from view. Franz Kugler, a pioneer in the study of Babylonian astronomy, offered a radically different interpretation. The Phaethon story, according to the renowned Jesuit scholar, celebrated an *extraordinary* meteor shower. At the same time, Kugler offered a damning critique of previous interpretations based upon the familiar peaceful skies:

“So simple, ordinary and peaceful a phenomenon as the evening sky could not provide the basis for a legend which patently describes complicated, extraordinary and violent events. And yet neither, on the other hand, could the appearance of Venus as the morning star awaken the idea of universal catastrophe—even in the wildest imagination. One might well conceive of the morning star as the driver of Helios' chariot, or imagine the evening star to be a deity fallen from the chariot of the sun...In the same way, the climb of Venus to its maximum elongation could be interpreted mythically as a striving for dominion in the heavens. But a Phaethon in the sense of the ‘Hesiodic’ or the Alexandrine version (which latter has been regarded as the source for the narratives of Ovid, Lucian and Nonnos, *inter alia*...) could never be made of Venus.”

“There is however one natural phenomenon that could very easily occasion this legend. In the search for this, the following factors should be given the greatest possible consideration: (1) Phaethon appears not merely as a cognomen for Helios; he is also set fully equal to Helios

¹⁸ E. Krupp, *Echoes of Ancient Skies* (Mineola, 1994), pp. 83-84.

(especially in Nonnos). (2) Phaethon is not the driver of a sun-chariot in which Helios is also traveling, but takes the other's place. (3) The journey is different in both direction and pace from that of the sun. (4) The firmament is brightly inflamed. (5) Phaethon is struck by lightning, and falls to earth. (6) The flames of Phaethon's fire also set fire to the earth.—Now, with all of these certain meteoritic phenomena are completely in accord.”

“Again and again, not only in modern times, but also long ago in antiquity, meteors have been observed which resemble the sun in respect of size and brilliance, and cross the sky at great speed in various directions, not rarely exploding, to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning, sometimes setting fire to terrestrial settlements and fields with their glowing debris. That, according to the popular and poetic conception, such an unexpected apparition should bring the stars into confusion, can readily be understood.”¹⁹

Kugler's catastrophic interpretation subsequently found favor with the Classicist James Diggle, if with few other modern scholars.²⁰ In his book-length treatment of Euripides' *Phaethon*, Diggle dismissed the solar interpretation, arguing that the hero's tragic demise is better understood as commemorating a singular catastrophe than a regularly occurring phenomenon:

“That Phaethon's fall attempts to explain in mythical terms why the sun sinks blazing in the west as if crashing to earth in flames and yet returns to its task unimpaired the following day, cannot be entertained. Phaethon's crash is an event out of the ordinary, a sudden and unexpected calamity, occurring once and not daily.”²¹

Immanuel Velikovsky also offered a catastrophic interpretation of Plato's myth in the controversial bestseller *Worlds in Collision*, published in 1950. According to Velikovsky's reconstruction of ancient history, the Phaethon story describes the Earth under assault by the

¹⁹ F. Kugler, as translated by M. Lowery, “Father Kugler's Falling Star,” *Kronos* 2:4 (1977), pp. 10-11.

²⁰ J. Blomqvist, “The Fall of Phaethon and the Kaalijarvi Meteorite Crater: Is There a Connection?,” *Eranos* 92 (1994), pp. 1-16 suggests that Phaethon's fall has reference to the fall of a meteorite in the Baltic in 4000 BCE. See also Wilhelm Gundel's review of Kugler's monograph, *Gnomon* 4 (1928), pp. 449-451; P. James & M. A. van der Sluijs, “The Fall of Phaethon in Context: A New Synthesis of Mythological, Archaeological and Geological Evidence,” *JANER* 16:1 (2016), pp. 67-94.

²¹ J. Diggle, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

planet Venus (Phaethon), then moving on a cometary orbit.²² Velikovsky summarized his thesis as follows:

“Phaëthon, which means ‘the blazing star,’ became the Morning Star. The earliest writer who refers to the transformation of Phaëthon into a planet is Hesiod [citing *Theogony* 989ff]. The transformation is related by Hyginus in his *Astronomy*, where he tells how Phaëthon...was struck by a thunderbolt of Jupiter and was placed by the sun among the stars (planets). It was the general belief that Phaëthon changed into the Morning Star [citing Georg Knaack’s article on Phaëthon in Roscher’s *Lexikon*, col. 2182]...A blazing star disrupted the visible movement of the sun, caused a world conflagration and became the Morning-Evening Star. This may be found not only in the legends and traditions, but also in astronomical books of the ancient peoples of both hemispheres.”²³

Velikovsky’s handling of the ancient sources, unfortunately, leaves much to be desired.²⁴ Hesiod hardly offers a straightforward account of the “transformation of Phaëthon into a planet.” Far from it, in fact. The relevant passage from the *Theogony* reads as follows:

“And to Cephalus she [Eos] bare a splendid son, strong Phaëthon, a man like the gods, whom, when he was a young boy in the tender flower of glorious youth with childish thoughts, laughter-loving Aphrodite seized and caught up and made a keeper of her shrine by night, a divine spirit.”²⁵

In fairness to Velikovsky, the passage in question has long represented a crux to scholars attempting to decipher the Phaethon myth. We will attempt to decipher Hesiod’s account of Phaethon in a later chapter.

To summarize our discussion to this point: A review of the literature has shown that some of the best minds in the history of classical scholarship have offered diametrically opposed opinions as

²² I. Velikovsky, *Worlds in Collision* (New York, 1950), pp. 158-159.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

²⁴ Velikovsky’s citing of Hyginus here is especially misleading. Although Hyginus’s *Astronomica* 2:42 identifies Hesiod’s Phaëthon with the Morning Star, it identifies the tragic charioteer with the Sun or, alternately, Saturn.

²⁵ *Theogony* 986-991 as translated by H. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Homeric* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 153.

to the original nature of Phaethon, alternately identifying him with the Sun, the planet Venus, or with some other celestial phenomenon entirely. Although some scholars, such as Kugler and Diggle, have favored a catastrophic interpretation of the Phaethon-myth, uniformitarian explanations certainly represent the consensus view. Profound disagreement also distinguishes the question as to whether or not the impetuous charioteer is to be identified with Aphrodite's paramour with the same name, as immortalized by Hesiod (see chapter seven). Thus we would appear to have reached an impasse in our attempt to discover the nature of the celestial events encoded in the Phaethon-myth, if any.

It is in situations like this that additional insight can sometimes be gained by examining analogous traditions from different cultures. If similar reports or mythological patterns can be found elsewhere, a comparative analysis can help reconstruct the probable historical context of the thematic patterns in question.

That the Greek myth of Phaethon has striking parallels from around the world is commonly acknowledged. Gregory Nagy argued the point most forcefully: "The basic motifs of this Phaethon story are founded on mythological universals."²⁶ That said, I know of no comprehensive study of Phaethon from the standpoint of comparative mythology.²⁷ The following analysis represents a preliminary attempt to rectify that situation.

From the familiar myths of ancient Greece we turn to consider the sacred traditions of the indigenous cultures of North America.

Chapter Two

²⁶ G. Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973), p. 148.

²⁷ Frazer's commentary to Apollodorus represents the outstanding exception in this regard: "Phaethon and the Sun," in *Apollodorus: The Library Vol. II* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 388-394. See also P. James & M. A. van der Sluijs, "The Fall of Phaeton in Context: A New Synthesis of Mythological, Archaeological and Geological Evidence," *JANER* 16:1 (2016), pp. 70-73.

Amerindian Parallels

“No other primitive people has such an extensive and accurate record of its myths, tales, and legends as the North American Indian.”²⁸

It has long been known that oral traditions from the New World share certain thematic patterns or mythemes in common with the Greek myth of Phaethon.²⁹ The distinguished anthropologist Franz Boas collected a number of such traditions from the indigenous cultures living along the Northern Pacific coast of North America. A Bella Coola account begins by recounting the trials and tribulations of a young woman who, in an attempt to rebuff the amorous advances of a malicious fellow named Stump, manages to escape to the house of the Sun, whom she subsequently marries. Boas translates the myth as follows:

“The woman now lived in a corner of the house of the Sun, and after a while she gave birth to a boy, the son of the Sun. His name was Totqoaya. He was very ugly, and his face was covered with sores. In time his mother longed to return to her father on earth; so, instructed by the Sun, she took her boy on her back and walked down the eyelashes of the Sun, which are the sunbeams, till she came in the evening to her father’s house...The next morning the boy went out of the house, and began to play with the other children, who made fun of him. Then he told them that his father was the Sun; but they merely laughed at him, until he grew very angry. Then he told his mother that he intended to return to his father in heaven. He made a great many arrows and a bow, went outside, and began to shoot his arrows upward. The first one struck the sky. The second one struck the notch of the first one. And thus he continued until a chain of arrows was formed which reached the ground. Then he climbed up; and after reaching heaven, he went into the Sun’s house. There he said, ‘Father, I wish to take your place to-morrow.’ The Sun consented, but said, ‘Take care that you do not burn the people. I use only one torch in the morning, and increase the number of torches until noon. In the afternoon I extinguish the torches one by one.’ On the following morning the boy took his father’s torches and went along the path of the Sun; but very soon he lighted up all the torches. It became very hot on earth. The woods began to burn, and the rocks to crack, and many people died...When the Sun saw what the boy

²⁸ S. Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians* (Bloomington, 1966), p. xvi.

²⁹ See the discussion in J. Frazer, *op. cit.*, pp. 388-394.

was doing, he caught him and threw him down to the earth, and said, ‘Henceforth you shall be the mink.’”³⁰

As in Ovid’s telling of the Phaethon story, the Bella Coola Phaethon is chided for being a bastard and because of this umbrage he is inspired to climb to heaven and inquire after his father. Most striking is the explicit linking of the Sun’s “son” to a cataclysmic world-conflagration, a circumstance that culminates in the rash youngster being hurled down from the heavenly heights.

New in the Bella Coola myth is the curious detail regarding the hero’s distinctive appearance—he is described as covered with sores. As we will discover, this datum offers an important clue to the hero’s celestial identity.

New also is the report that the hero’s journey to meet his father involved an ascent to heaven along a chain of arrows. We will return to this widespread mytheme in a later chapter.

Another Bella Coola informant preserved a radically different version of the story. In this telling the hero’s destructive behavior arises out of vengeful belligerence rather than from mere carelessness. And it is the youth’s unkempt appearance—his face is said to be “dirty”—rather than his suspect parentage that inspires his comrades to mock him. Upon being bullied, the boy brashly announces to his tormentors that he will go up to heaven and make his father incinerate them all. As Boas recounts the story:

“He began to climb up the eyelashes of Snq [the Sun], which were the sun’s rays, and thus reached the sky. He asked his father whether he could carry the sun in his stead. His father gave it to him and he climbed up in the morning, carrying the sun. Towards noon he made the sun hotter and hotter so that houses and trees started to burn...He said to the people, ‘You see, I’ve burned your houses because you tormented me.’”³¹

³⁰ James Frazer, “Phaethon and the Sun,” in *Apollodorus: The Library Vol. II* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 390-391. See also F. Boas, *The Mythology of the Bella Coola Indians* (New York, 1898), pp. 100-103.

³¹ F. Boas, *Indian Myths & Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America* (Vancouver, 2002), p. 509.

Interestingly, at this point in the narrative, with nary a hint of what is to come next, it is reported: “He had become more pure and more handsome now.”³² As we will discover, the magical transformation of a previously ugly Phaethon-like figure into a beautiful youth is an archetypal and seemingly universal thematic pattern, one to which we will return again and again throughout this monograph.³³

The Kwakiutl Indians of British Columbia preserved a very similar story, a not unexpected situation given the fact that they formerly lived in close proximity to the Bella Coola. As is often the case even amongst close neighbors, the Kwakiutl narrative preserves additional information of interest. In this version of the myth Mink’s mother becomes impregnated by the rays of the Sun. Once again, Mink’s playmates make fun of him for his apparent bastardy and, upon learning his father’s identity from his mother, the youth resolves to journey to the house of the Sun. At that point Mink begins shooting arrows at the sky:

“Then Born-to-be-the-Sun shot one of the arrows upward. It is said it struck our sky. Then he shot another one upward. It struck the nock of the one that he had shot upward first; then again another one, and it hit the end of his arrow. His arrows came down sticking together. Then he shot the last one, and it hit the end of the one he had shot before. They came to the ground. Then the mother of Born-to-be-the-Sun took the end of the arrows and shook them, and they became a rope...Then Born-to-be-the-Sun climbed, going upward. He went to visit his father. He arrived, and went through to the upper side of the sky.”³⁴

After receiving some paternal advice, Mink expresses his wish to act as a substitute Sun. Shortly thereafter, upon being provided with his father’s magical garments, the impetuous youth starts off on the trail otherwise associated with the Sun’s daily journey. As in the Greek legend, the hero’s carelessness soon leads to disaster:

“Already this world began to burn. There was noise of the cracking of mountains, caught fire...That was the reason of the fury of Born-to-be-the-Sun’s father. The chief pursued his

³² *Ibid.*

³³ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 56-93.

³⁴ F. Boas, *Kwakiutl Tales, Vol. II* (New York, 1910), pp. 124-125.

child. He reached him when the sun was not low. Then the clothing of Born-to-be-the-Sun was taken away...Born-to-be-the-Sun was just taken by the neck by his father, and was thrown through the hole. Born-to-be-the-Sun came down. A canoe was paddling along, and came right to Born-to-be-the-Sun. 'Is this our chief, Born-to-be-the-Sun, floating about?' Then he raised his head on the water when they touched him with the paddle. 'Indeed, I have been asleep on the water a long time.' He went ashore and went inland."³⁵

As in the Greek myth, the Sun's son is hurled from heaven. Most noteworthy is the fact that the Kwakiutl Phaethon, like his Greek counterpart, is cast into a body of water after bringing the world to the very brink of destruction. Unlike Phaethon, however, Mink survives the fall from heaven with his reputation intact, later being hailed as a "chief." Clearly this was no ordinary youth.

Phaethon and the Deluge

Another Bella Coola version of the myth recorded by Boas further clarifies the nature of the cataclysm associated with the Amerindian Phaethon.³⁶ Here a woman named Nuspuselxsakai'x longs to marry the Sun and, after rejecting the offers of numerous mortal suitors, sets off for his house. Upon reaching the celestial domicile and giving her hand in marriage, the woman is surprised to find that she is pregnant with his son, this despite the fact that only one day has elapsed since they first consummated their love. Of this son—the aforementioned T'otqoa'ya—it was said: "He grew very quickly, and on the second day of his life he was able to walk and talk."

The precocious youngster soon asked to meet his mother's parents, which leads him to descend to earth along the "rays of the Sun." While there the boy is teased by the local children for his apparent bastardy, thereby prompting him to shoot a number of arrows at the sky in order to build a ladder-to-heaven. At that point the beleaguered son sets out to meet his father, the Sun:

³⁵ J. Frazer, *op cit.*, p. 393. See also F. Boas, *Kwakiutl Tales*, Vol. 2 (NY, 1910), pp. 123-127.

³⁶ F. Boas, "The Mythology of the Bella Coola Indians," *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History* II (1898), pp. 95-97.

“Then he ascended the chain. He found the house of Smai’yakila [the Sun], which he entered. He told his father that the boys had been teasing him, and he asked him to let him carry the sun. But his father said, ‘You cannot do it. I carry many torches. Early in the morning and late in the evening I burn many torches, but at noon I burn the large ones.’ T’ōtqoa’ya insisted on his request. Then his father gave him the torches, warning him at the same time to observe carefully the instructions that he was giving him in regard to their use. Early the next morning, T’ōtqoa’ya started on the course of the sun, carrying the torches. Soon he grew impatient, and lighted all the torches at once. Then it grew very hot. The trees began to burn, and many animals jumped into the water to save themselves, but the water began to boil. Then Nuspuselxsakai’x covered the people with her blanket, and thus saved them...When Smai’yakila saw what was happening, he said to his son, ‘Why do you do so? Do you think it is good that there are no people on the earth!’ Smai’yakila took him and cast him down from the heavens, saying ‘You shall be the mink, and future generations of man shall hunt you.’ Then Smai’yakila caused the waters to rise, so that they covered the whole country except a few mountains...The Bella Coola and Bella Bella tied their canoes to the tops of the mountains, and for this reason they were not lost...Finally Smai’yakila caused the waters to subside, and the people descended from the mountains, and rebuilt their villages...After the water had subsided, Smai’yakila said, ‘I shall not make another deluge, and I will make the land beautiful.’”³⁷

In this narrative the Deluge is made contemporary with the conflagration brought about by the actions of the Phaethon-like hero. This datum is an important clue to the mytho-historical context of the Phaethon myth, one to which we will return. Suffice it to note that Ovid also linked the Phaethon-cataclysm to the Deluge.³⁸ Hyginus provides a succinct summary of this common belief:

“Phaethon, son of the Sun-god and Clymene, mounts his father’s chariot in secret but crashes into the Eridanos. He is struck by a thunderbolt. The resulting fire is extinguished by a flood, from which only Deucalion and Pyrrha survive.”³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

³⁸ G. Knaack, “Phaëthon,” in W. Röscher ed., *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig, 1884-1937), col. 2189. See also B. Otis, *Ovid as Epic Poet* (Copenhagen, 1974), p. 393.

³⁹ J. Diggle, *op. cit.*, p. 18. See Hyginus’s *Fabulae* 152A.

Baked Phaethon

“On the North Pacific Coast the hero cycle merges with...tales of journeys to the other world. In these stories there is, from the point of view of the civilized reader, a confusion of worlds. Usually the ‘other world’ is pictured as above; sometimes as below; sometimes as across a vast river or sea. The cosmological concepts of the particular tribe are always in the background of these tales, and a real understanding of what the narrator has in mind can often be gained only by a serious study of the religious ideas of the tribe. In spite, however, of tribal differences, such simple concepts as a star-world, a sky window, a rope to the sky, a rainbow-bridge to the upper world are to be found everywhere.”⁴⁰

A central motif in the Greek myth of Phaethon finds world conflagration resulting from the hero’s inaugural ride in his father’s chariot. Indeed, Helios’s son is represented as being incinerated or “scorched” as a result of his reckless behavior. The same motif is to be found in New World alloforms of the Phaethon theme. C. Hill Tout collected the following narrative from the Stseélis (Chehalis) Indians of British Columbia (the Stseélis were a Salish tribe living along the Fraser River). As in the Bella Coola traditions, the youthful hero is identified with Mink, here named Skaiaq. Upon learning that his father was actually the Sun, the indomitable hero sets out to visit him in the sky:

“Now the Sun’s wife would not look at Skaiaq, and he wondered why. The next morning the Sun said to Skaiaq, ‘Don’t put anything on the fire that crackles and sends out sparks.’ But the first thing that Skaiaq did was to go out and gather wood that crackled and sent out sparks in the burning...His object in doing this was to get a look at his father’s wife’s face. She was the Thunder and Lightning. Now she had kept her face hidden from him lest he should be burnt and scorched to death by her glances. When the cedar began to crackle and shoot, she turned round to see what was the matter, and Skaiaq was instantly shriveled up, only his skin and bones remaining.”⁴¹

Eventually, the Sun restores Skaiaq to life through magical means. At this point, no longer trusting his son to do as he was told, the Sun counsels him for the daily solar jaunt across the sky:

⁴⁰ S. Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians* (Bloomington, 1966), p. xix.

⁴¹ C. Hill Tout, “Ethnological Report on the Stseélis and Sk-aúlit Tribes...,” *JRAI* 34 (1904), p. 346.

“Next morning, Skaiaq received the following instruction from the Sun. ‘You must keep the day bright till about noon, then go behind a cloud for a little while; in the afternoon do the same again.’ Skaiaq promised to carry out his wishes. After sunset he returned to his father, who asked if he had done as he had bidden him. ‘Yes, I did exactly what you told me,’ replied Skaiaq. The next day he went out, and again a third day, and was careful to do as his father had instructed him. After the third day he said he was tired, and wanted to rest, so his father went out himself the following day. Before he left, however, he warned Skaiaq not to climb up on the rafters of the house. Skaiaq promised to comply with his wishes. But no sooner had his father the Sun set out upon his course than Skaiaq said to himself, ‘I wonder why he doesn’t want me to go up there. I shall certainly climb up,’ and he straightaway set about doing so. When he got among the rafters he saw the genitalia of a woman hanging there; and he had coition. When he returns to the ground again, he finds his step-mother dead. When the Sun came home that night, and saw his wife lying dead he knew that Skaiaq had disobeyed him and had caused her death. So he takes a club, and clubs him to death and throws out his dead body. Then he steps four times over his wife’s corpse, and she is restored to life again. After some time Skaiaq also comes to life, and returns to his grandfather again.”⁴²

The hero’s climbing to heaven—a recurring motif in the Bella Coola and Kwakiutl Phaethon narratives—is absent here. Most likely, the curious episode in which Skaiaq climbs the rafters has been substituted for the ascent along the ladder-to-heaven (his ascent to heaven, in any case, is implicit in his “climbing” to the heavenly kingdom of his father).

The Amerindian traditions cited here prompt a wealth of questions. How are we to explain the striking correspondences between the Old and New World accounts? Are such correspondences to be considered the product of diffusion, or independent invention? James Frazer opted to leave the question open:

“Whether the remarkable resemblances between the Greek and the Indian versions of the tale are to be explained as due to independent invention or to European influence, is a question which, so

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 346.

far as I know, there is no evidence to determine, and on which therefore it would be rash to pronounce an opinion.”⁴³

It is our opinion that neither independent invention nor European influence can explain the remarkable parallels between the Old and New World Phaethon-traditions.⁴⁴ Rather, such correspondences are best understood as the byproduct of common experience—in this case by the memorable experience of cosmic catastrophe occasioned by the dramatic fall of a prominent celestial body. In order to clarify the nature of the celestial events in question, as well as the mytho-historical context of the Phaethon-traditions, we must identify the substitute sun in question.

⁴³ J. Frazer, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

⁴⁴ Stith Thompson, “The Star Husband Tale,” in *Liber Saecularis in Honorem J. Qvigstadii* (Oslo, 1953), p. 96 observed with respect to the Amerindian tales that they betray no sign or “likelihood of influence (1) from other continents or (2) from written or printed tales.”

Chapter Three

Morning Star

“Equating him [Phaethon] with the morning and evening star (Phosphorus, Hesperus) is equally problematical to sustain.”⁴⁵

“All these facts originate from the same event in cosmic history, and so do hosts of others yet more marvelous than these. However, as this great event took place so long ago, some of them have faded from man’s memory; others survive but they have become scattered and have come to be told in a way which obscures their real connection with one another. No one has related the great event of history which gives the setting of all of them; it is this event which we must now recount.”⁴⁶

How, then, are we to determine which celestial body best corresponds to the mythical Phaethon? Apart from James Frazer and Gregory Nagy, most researchers have ignored the voluminous database that is comparative mythology. A decisive clue is provided by the Bella Coola description of the Phaethonesque hero as “covered with sores.” As we have documented elsewhere, various cultures throughout the Americas describe the “Morning Star” as similarly afflicted.⁴⁷ One of the most instructive myths in this regard comes from the Sikuani Indians of the Orinoco region of Colombia and Venezuela. Virtually unknown prior to the 20th century, the Sikuani long resisted the determined efforts of clerics and researchers to infiltrate their culture and learn their sacred ritual traditions. In fact, it is only in the last fifty years that anthropologists have succeeded in recording the tribe’s oral traditions, a number of which preserve what appear to be extremely archaic mythological motifs. The Creation myth of the Sikuani begins as follows:

“In those days the sun and the moon and everyone were human beings and lived on this earth. Sun had a son who had sores all over his body; he was the morning star.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ T. Heinze, “Phaëthon,” in H. Cancik & H. Schneider eds., *Brill’s New Pauly* 10 (Leiden, 2007), col. 905.

⁴⁶ *Politics* 269b5-c3 as translated in L. Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker* (Chicago, 1999), p. 110.

⁴⁷ E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 64-72.

⁴⁸ J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Sikuani Indians* (Los Angeles, 1992), pp. 25-28.

The “Morning Star” is here identified as the “son” of the Sun, thereby mirroring the name of the Bella Coola Phaethon. Interestingly, the Sikuani report that the Morning Star experienced a sudden metamorphosis into the “handsomest man in the world,” thereby recalling the Bella Coola Phaethon who, formerly ugly, suddenly became very handsome:

“One morning they finally arrived at his father’s house...They greeted one another but then grabbed hold of one another as if to fight. Morning Star, growing larger than his father and brothers, won all the fights...He came out of the mêlée winning his fights like a king...The next morning he bathed and turned into the handsomest man in the world.”⁴⁹

Equally significant is the report that the Sikuani “Morning Star” is described as a “king,” much as the Kwakiutl Phaethon is described as a “chief.” As it turns out, the Morning Star’s mythical status as a primeval “king” is proverbial in nature, being attested in pre-Columbian Mexico as well as in South America. The Mexican god-man Quetzalcoatl, venerated as the “Morning Star” but also as the first king to assume the throne, offers an exemplary model in this regard. The Franciscan friar Motolinia, writing in the period from 1536 to 1541, emphasized the paradigmatic function of Quetzalcoatl, revered as the “first lord to sit on the throne” and the divine role model for rulers everywhere:

“From him, they say, descended the people of Colhua, the ancestors of Moteuczoma, lords of Mexico and Colhuacan. It is said that the Indians considered Quetzalcoatl one of their principal gods, calling him god of the air. Everywhere they erected innumerable temples in his honor, set up his image and painted his figure.”⁵⁰

That Quetzalcoatl was identified with the Morning Star is well known. As Las Casas and other early commentators pointed out, the aboriginal Mexicans believed their beloved king was transformed into the Morning Star after his death:

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28.

⁵⁰ Quoted from D. Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* (Chicago, 1982), p. 42.

“After the sun, which they held as their principal god, they honored and worshipped a certain star (I could not learn which star this was) more than any other denizen of the heavens or earth, because they held it as certain that their god, Quetzalcóvatl, the highest god of the Cholulans, when he died transformed into this star.”⁵¹

According to other sources, the god-man was incinerated prior to his transformation into the Morning Star. The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, composed around 1570, provide a much-embellished version of Quetzalcoatl’s immolation:

“They say that in the year One Reed, having arrived at the sacred shores of the holy sea, he stopped and wept. Then he gathered up his vestments and dressed himself for a ceremony, putting on his robes of quetzal feathers and his turquoise mask. When he was finished dressing, he immediately set himself on fire, and was consumed by the flames. For this reason the place where Quetzalcoatl was burned is called Tlatlayan (Burning Place). And it is said that as he burned, his ashes rose, and all the precious birds appeared, rising and circling in the skies:...When the ashes were gone, at that moment, the heart of Quetzalcoatl rose upward. They knew he had risen into the sky and entered the heavens. The old ones say that he became the star that appears at dawn. They say that it appeared when Quetzalcoatl died, and because of this they named him Lord of the Dawn.”⁵²

As the Lord of the Dawn, or Tlahuizcalpanteuctli, Quetzalcoatl is identifiable with the mythical Morning Star.

Quetzalcoatl’s self-immolation is described in other post-conquest documents as well. Henry Nicholson summarized the different accounts as follows: “In most of the versions in which he dies, he is cremated and his soul ascends to heaven and becomes the Morning Star.”⁵³

⁵¹ Las Casas (ca. 1484-1566) as quoted in A. Christenson, *Popol Vuh* (New York, 2003), p. 218.

⁵² Translation by David Johnson, “Quetzalcóatl: Myth, Legend and History,” in R. Anaya, *Lord of the Dawn* (Albuquerque, 1987), p. 14.

⁵³ H. Nicholson, “Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico,” in G. Ekholm & I. Bernal eds., *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica* (Austin, 1971), p. 429.

Quetzalcoatl himself, moreover, was described as being grotesquely ugly, with “warts” or sores all over his face.⁵⁴ Indeed the god’s hideous appearance formed a conspicuous subject of religious ritual. Thus, the Dominican missionary Diego Durán describes a comic dance at Quetzalcoatl’s feast featuring “a man swollen with tumors, feigning to be sorely afflicted by them, moaning over the pains he felt.”⁵⁵ As to the serious nature of the mimetic dances in question, Durán had no doubt: “All these native farces were highly amusing and pleasant, but were not acted out without pagan meaning, for they stemmed from the fact that the god Quetzalcoatl was held to be the advocate for tumors, eye disease, colds, and coughing.”⁵⁶

The First Star

Granted that Quetzalcoatl is to be identified as the “Morning Star,” how are we to determine which particular planet or star inspired such traditions? This is the all-important question, needless to say. On this matter the sacred traditions of the Skidi Pawnee of North America prove to be particularly instructive.

Included among the various tribes that Lewis and Clark encountered during their famous trek across the heartland of North America were the Skidi Pawnee, who had settled along the Loup river in what is now central Nebraska.⁵⁷ The Skidi comprise one of the four major bands of the Pawnee and are thought to have preserved religious beliefs otherwise characteristic of the cultures of Mesoamerica and the American Southwest.

The Skidi were inveterate sky-watchers. Indeed, it has been said that they were “obsessed with the planets”⁵⁸ and had “a sky oriented theology perhaps without parallel in human history.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ See *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, act one. See also H. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder, 2001), p. 42.

⁵⁵ Fray Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites* (Norman, 1971), p. 135.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁷ For a general overview of their history, see B. Pritzker, *A Native American Encyclopedia* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 350-352.

⁵⁸ V. Del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982), p. 82.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

For the Skidi the mythical “Morning Star” was the planet Mars, envisaged as a powerful warrior of irascible disposition and prodigious strength. The anthropologist James Murie, himself of Skidi heritage, summarized the lore surrounding this planet as follows:

“The first one he [the god Tirawa] placed in the heavens was Morning Star...This being was to stand on a hot bed of flint. He was to be dressed like a warrior and painted all over with red dust. His head was to be decked with soft down and he was to carry a war club. He was not a chief, but a warrior. He was to follow up all other stars and was to have greater powers than any other god in the heavens. Through him people were to be created and he would demand of the people an offering of a human being. He was to preside over one council of the gods and was to replenish fire for his brother, Sun. He was also to be the great power on the east side of the Milky Way. This is Mars, *u-pirikucu* (literally, ‘big star’), or the god of war.”⁶⁰

The planet Venus, somewhat surprisingly, was carefully distinguished from the Morning Star by the Skidi, being conceptualized as a Star Woman by the name of *Cu-piritta-ka*, which translates literally as “female white star.”⁶¹ Murie summarized the mythical traditions surrounding this planet-goddess as follows:

“The second god Tirawahat placed in the heavens was Evening Star, known to the white people as Venus...She was a beautiful woman. By speaking and waving her hands she could perform wonders. Through this star and Morning Star all things were created. She is the mother of the Skiri [Skidi]. Through her it is possible for people to increase and crops to mature.”⁶²

It will be noted that the Skidi, like other renowned skywatchers, conceptualized Venus as a “beautiful woman” responsible for sexual unions and fertility.

Like numerous other indigenous cultures, the Skidi traced their origins to natural events involving the respective planets. The central act of Skidi cosmogony described the Martian warrior’s pursuit and eventual conquest of the planet Venus. Creation itself was said to have

⁶⁰ J. Murie, “Ceremonies of the Pawnee,” *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology* 27 (Cambridge, 1981), p. 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶² *Ibid.*

unfolded as a direct result of their sexual union. In summarizing the cosmogonic myth in question, the anthropologist Ralph Linton stated simply “The Morning Star married the Evening Star.”⁶³

The *hieros gamos* between Mars and Venus was ritually reenacted during especially sacred celebrations. On rare occasions, or in the advent of some ominous event—the appearance of a meteor, an epidemic, or some other portent—the Pawnee offered a human sacrifice to the Morning Star, usually in the years when Mars appeared as a morning star.⁶⁴ Here a band of warriors would accompany a man impersonating the Morning Star in raiding a neighboring campsite, where they sought to kidnap a young woman of choice. Along the way there was much singing and dancing, during which the heroic deeds of the Martian warrior were recounted and celebrated. Upon capturing a suitable victim, the war party returned to the Skidi village where several months might elapse while the priests prepared for the sacrifice and awaited signs for the most propitious time. The culmination of the rite saw the young woman—representing Venus—being painted head to toe and outfitted with a curious fan-shaped headdress.⁶⁵ The victim was then led to a scaffold specially erected for the occasion whereupon, after mounting the final rung, she was shot through the heart by an arrow from the bow of the man impersonating Morning Star. The priests in charge of the gruesome rite took great care to ensure that the girl’s blood was directed to a cavity below the scaffold. This pit was lined with white feathers and was held to represent the sacred garden of the planet-goddess: “The pit symbolized the Garden of the Evening Star from which all life originates.”⁶⁶ In the Pawnee village, successful completion of the sacrifice was greeted with great rejoicing and a period of “ceremonial sexual license to promote fertility.”⁶⁷

⁶³ R. Linton, “The Sacrifice to Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee,” *Leaflet Field Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology* 6 (1923), p. 5

⁶⁴ R. Linton, “The Origin of the Skidi Pawnee Sacrifice to the Morning Star,” *American Anthropologist* 28 (1928), p. 457. See also the detailed analysis by Von Del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982).

⁶⁵ See the photo on page 190 of E. Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon* (New York, 1991).

⁶⁶ G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 112.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

As bizarre as this rite appears to the modern reader, anthropologists are generally agreed as to its fundamental purpose—namely, to commemorate the sacred events of Creation. Ralph Linton's comments on the ritual are representative in this regard:

“The sacrifice as a whole must be considered as a dramatization of the overcoming of the Evening Star by the Morning Star and their subsequent connection, from which sprang all life on earth. The girl upon the scaffold seems to have been conceived of as a personification or embodiment of the Evening Star surrounded by her powers. When she was overcome, the life of the earth was renewed, insuring universal fertility and increase.”⁶⁸

The Skidi traditions with respect to Venus and Mars raise a number of intriguing questions. How are we to explain the origin of such peculiar ideas and practices? The simplest explanation, as well as the most logical, is to trace the respective traditions to witnessed natural events involving Venus and Mars. We would thus endorse the opinion expressed by the astronomer Ray Williamson: “The care with which the Pawnee observed the sky and noted the celestial events suggests that the story of Morning Star and Evening Star, in addition to serving as an explanation of the original events of the Pawnee universe, might also reflect actual celestial occurrences.”⁶⁹

It was the astronomer Von Del Chamberlain who conducted the most extensive investigation into the historical basis of the Skidi traditions.⁷⁰ He, too, concluded that astronomical events inspired the sacred traditions in question: “The conjunctions of Venus and Mars do seem to be the key to the Skidi concept of celestial parentage.”⁷¹ As for how these “conjunctions” were to be understood from an astronomical standpoint, Von Del Chamberlain opined that they had reference to Mars' periodic migration from the morning sky to the western evening sky whereupon, on very rare occasions, it would conjoin with Venus. Other astronomers have since endorsed Chamberlain's interpretation.⁷²

⁶⁸ R. Linton, “The Sacrifice to Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee,” *Leaflet Field Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology* 6 (1923), p. 17.

⁶⁹ R. Williamson, *Living the Sky* (Norman, 1984), p. 225.

⁷⁰ V. Del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (College Park, 1982).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷² E. Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon* (New York, 1991), pp. 189-192.

Granted that “actual celestial occurrences” are encoded in the Skidi myth of Creation, it remains far from obvious how we are to understand the origin of the specific motifs surrounding the respective planets given Von Del Chamberlain’s theory. Why was Venus conceptualized as the prototypical female power? Why was Mars viewed as masculine in nature or identified as Morning Star? Why would the periodic, relatively mundane, conjunction of these two particular planets be linked to Creation and ideas of universal fertility? Not one of these questions finds a satisfactory explanation under the thesis advanced by Del Chamberlain.

Perhaps the most important question is how representative the Skidi beliefs are with respect to ancient conceptions of the Morning Star? As we have documented elsewhere, there is a wealth of evidence that can be brought to bear on this question. A valuable bit of testimony comes from the sacred traditions surrounding Quetzalcoatl. In the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, a colonial text providing commentary on prehispanic paintings and sacred lore that dates from around 1560, it is stated that Quetzalcoatl—as the Morning Star—was regarded as the first “light” to appear at Creation.⁷³ The *Codex* also includes the following gloss offered by an anonymous scribe: “Properly speaking, the first light that appeared in the world.”⁷⁴

This apparent vestige from Aztec sacred lore offers a striking parallel to the Skidi report that the planet Mars, as the Morning Star, was the first star to appear in heaven. Recall again Murie’s account of Creation: “The first one he placed in the heavens was the morning star.”⁷⁵

Now here is an interesting report. Why would Mars, rather than some other planet or star, be deemed the “first” to appear in heaven at Creation? The answer to this question will go a long way towards explaining the historical context—and celestial roots—of ancient cosmogonies everywhere.⁷⁶ A satisfactory answer to this question, moreover, is also central to reconstructing the celestial determinants of the Phaethon-myth.

⁷³ E. Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* (Austin, 1995), p. 175.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁷⁵ J. Murie, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁷⁶ We intend to explore this theme in greater detail in a future volume in this series.

Other New World cultures preserved analogous traditions about the Morning Star. According to the Cherokee Indians of North America, the Morning Star was the first star to appear in the sky at Creation: “At the beginning of the world it appeared first of all the stars.”⁷⁷ Significantly, the Cherokee name for the Morning Star translates as “Great Star,” the very epithet accorded the same planet by the Skidi and Maya, among other Amerindian tribes.

A similar tradition was preserved by the Maya. Thus, the Morning Star’s epiphany at Creation is described as follows in the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred text of the Quiché Maya of Guatemala compiled during the sixteenth century:

“And here is the dawning and showing of the sun, moon, and stars. And Jaguar Quitze, Jaguar Night, Machucutah, and True Jaguar were overjoyed when they saw the daybringer. It came up first. It looked brilliant when it came up, since it was ahead of the sun.”⁷⁸

The Inca Quechua of South America likewise accorded the “Morning Star” a fundamental primacy in cosmogonic lore. Witness the following tradition recorded by Gary Urton: “*Papa pachapacariq ch’aska* (‘father morning star’), which is said to have been the first bright object to appear in the dark primeval sky at the beginning of time.”⁷⁹

If the Morning Star was deemed the “first light” to appear at Creation, how are we to verify the Skidi memory that it was the planet Mars and not Venus, as the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* might lead us to believe? Perhaps the most compelling testimony on the matter comes from the rainforests of South America, where the Makiritare Indians have remained virtually immune from outside influences while pursuing a stone-age lifestyle along the Orinoco River in Venezuela. The anthropologist Marc de Civrieux, working in the 1950’s, managed to collect and transcribe for the first time a collection of their sacred oral traditions—the *Watunna*. According to de Civrieux, “the myths of the Makiritare are the story of what the ‘Old People’, the Heavenly

⁷⁷ S. Hagar, “Cherokee Star-Lore,” in B. Laufer ed., *Boas Anniversary Volume* (New York, 1906), p. 357. Special thanks are due to Rens van der Sluijs for drawing my attention to this important tradition.

⁷⁸ D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* (New York, 1985), p. 181.

⁷⁹ G. Urton, *At the Crossroads of the Earth and Sky* (Austin, 1981), p. 107.

Ancestors, did.”⁸⁰ In the Makiritare account of Creation, it is reported that Mars was the first star to appear in heaven:

“We’re going to heaven. Okay. Who’ll go? Who’ll be first? Who’s going with the arrows?” There was another man named Ahishama. He was very wise. “Can you?” Wlaha asked? “I’ll go,” Ahishama answered...He turned him into a bird. He was beautiful, brilliant, with orange-colored feathers, and very fast and light. His name was Ahishama, the troupiat [a species of bird]. There was another man. “Can you?” “I’ll go.” He turned him into a frog...They called him Kütto...Wlaha shot. The arrow sped out. It flew up. Troupiat flew up. Frog leapt. Wlaha screamed: “Fly! Jump! Catch it! Tie it! Ahishama was carrying the end of a vine in his beak. We call that vine he had *sahudiwa*, vine-chain. It’s a long, long vine, all wrinkled and creased...The seven Wlaha shot another arrow and then another and another. Seven arrows in all. They hung there in space, seven rungs tied to that big vine. It was the ladder, the road to Heaven. That Troupiat and that Frog built it. Ahishama and Kütto. They climbed up without a ladder. When they built it there was no road.

They were the first ones to arrive. Right away they changed. They started shining. They were the first two stars in the black night. The very first was Ahishama, then Kütto. Now that Troupiat named Ahishama burns orange (Mars). He built the ladder in space. That’s what they say.”⁸¹

The significance of this sacred tradition from the *Watunna* is immeasurable for it serves to corroborate the Skidi claim that the planet Mars was the first star to appear at Creation. This finding, in turn, raises the distinct possibility that the fundamentally analogous reports of the Aztecs, Maya, and Inca with respect to the cosmogonic primacy of the Morning Star are best understood as originally referring to the red planet and not Venus. It will be noticed, moreover, that the Makiritare—like the Skidi, Inca, Aztecs, and Maya—ascribed a masculine nature to the prototypical “first star.” Properly interpreted, this datum also supports a Martian identity of the mythical Morning Star inasmuch as the red planet was regarded as a masculine planetary power

⁸⁰ M. de Civrieux, *Watunna: An Orinoco Creation Cycle* (San Francisco, 1980), p. 12.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

by cultures around the globe. The planet Venus, in contrast, was typically accorded a female form by ancient skywatchers.

Chapter Four

The Star That Fell From the Sky

“I sympathize with those who are reluctant to accept the theory that ‘Phaethon’s fall attempts to explain in mythical terms why the sun sinks blazing in the west as if crashing to earth in flames and yet returns to its task unimpaired the following day.’ One counterexplanation runs as follows: ‘Phaethon’s crash is an event out of the ordinary, a sudden and unexpected calamity, occurring once and not daily.’ In such matters, however, I would heed the intuitively appealing approach of Lévi-Strauss. A myth, he concedes, ‘always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago.’ Nevertheless, ‘what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future.’ Accordingly, I find it unnecessary to entertain the proposal, based only on naturalistic intuition, that the Phaethon myth represents the fall of a meteorite. The meteorite explanation, as also the sunset explanation, operates on the assumption that the message of the Phaethon myth is simply a metaphorical expression of some phenomenon that occurs in the sky. I disagree. The Phaethon myth presents a problem, not a solution. Furthermore, this problem addresses the human condition, not just celestial dynamics.”⁸²

“He whose flesh just now was in the bloom of youth was quenched like a falling star and he released his soul into the *aither*.”⁸³

A comparative analysis of New World mythology has suggested the possibility that the Morning Star was the celestial prototype behind Amerindian analogues of the Greek Phaethon. This deduction, in turn, naturally begs the question: Are there any Amerindian traditions which report that the Morning Star once fell from heaven?

The Cheyenne Indians preserved just such a story. The hero credited with bringing the instruments of culture to the tribe was known as Motseyoef, conventionally translated as “Sweet-Medicine.”⁸⁴ Included among the many innovations he is alleged to have introduced was how to produce fire by means of a fire-drill.⁸⁵ The same hero was also celebrated for leading the Cheyenne to their traditional homeland.⁸⁶

⁸² G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), p. 240.

⁸³ TrGF F 971 as translated in E. Csapo, “Star Choruses,” in M. Revermann & P. Wilson eds., *Performance, Iconography, Reception* (Oxford, 2008), p. 276.

⁸⁴ G. Grinnell, “Some Early Cheyenne Tales. II,” *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 21 (1908), p. 269.

⁸⁵ G. Grinnell, “Some Early Cheyenne Tales,” *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 20 (1907), p. 171.

⁸⁶ R. Schukies, *Red Hat* (Hamburg, 1993), p. 35.

A narrative recorded by the anthropologist Renate Schukies tells of the hero's stellar pedigree. It seems that Motseyoef's mother was a mortal who, once upon a time, was suddenly smitten by a beautiful star. As fate would have it, the young woman eventually succeeded in marrying the star and wound up living in heaven. Shortly thereafter the woman was warned by her husband not to dig in the celestial potato patch. Motseyoef's mother chose to ignore this prohibition and uprooted a potato, thereby revealing a hole in the celestial canopy that provided a bird's-eye view of her former campsite on Earth. Now hopelessly homesick, she resolved to return to Earth and forthwith set about preparing a long rope with which to descend. In her subsequent descent from the sky along the rope, however, the now pregnant woman fell to her death:

"So she dropped, she hit the ground. When she hit the ground, the baby came out, so far in the air. This little boy was Motseyoef."⁸⁷

In the days to follow the child grew with amazing rapidity and soon proved to be a great warrior. Upon reaching adulthood, and after having performed numerous heroic feats, Motseyoef married the daughter of the chief. Alas, after a long and illustrious life, the warrior-hero eventually rode off into the proverbial sunset, promising to return one day:

"When Motseyoef left the Cheyennes, he turned into the Morning Star. But Motseyoef told his people that he would come back one day."⁸⁸

The Cheyenne traditions surrounding Motseyoef are of paramount interest here because they conform to a widespread pattern associated with the mythical Morning Star. Motseyoef's metamorphosis into the Morning Star upon leaving this world forms a striking parallel to the apotheosis experienced by the Aztec Quetzalcoatl.⁸⁹ Note also that both gods were credited with drilling the first fire, and both gods were renowned for leading the tribal ancestors to their original homeland.⁹⁰ Equally significant is the report that Motseyoef—like Quetzalcoatl—promised to return one day.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸⁹ Renate Schukies, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-198 was the first to note the resemblance between the two culture heroes, so far as I'm aware.

⁹⁰ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 95-105.

The resemblance between Motseyoef and the Skidi Morning Star is particularly close—so close, in fact, that scholars have suspected a possible sharing of traditions between the Cheyenne and Skidi.⁹¹ Like the Skidi Mars, Motseyoef is represented as a great warrior. And, as was the case with the Skidi Morning Star, Motseyoef is credited with drilling the first fire—a signature of Creation amongst the Skidi as in other indigenous cultures.

Especially relevant is the distinctive color ascribed to the Cheyenne Morning Star: It was said of Motseyoef that “he was painted red all over.”⁹² Here, too, a precise parallel can be found in Skidi descriptions of the planet Mars: “The Morning Star is like a man; he is painted red all over.”⁹³ It goes without saying that this description is perfectly appropriate for the planet Mars, known around the globe as the “red star.”

The Crow Indians preserved a particularly detailed and informative example of the Falling Star myth. Like the Cheyenne, the Crow made their living hunting buffalo in nomadic bands across the North American plains. According to the Crow, the mythical Morning Star was a son of the Sun and a mortal woman. Once upon a time, the Sun had descended to earth and impregnated the woman in question, only to take her up to heaven in order to bear their child. While growing up in the solar wonderland, the boy is ridiculed for his mortal bloodlines: “You are not one of us, you are a human, go back to where you came from.”⁹⁴

As in the Cheyenne account of Motseyoef, quoted above, the Sun’s mortal bride is warned to follow certain injunctions while digging roots—in this case, she is instructed not to disturb a particular buffalo chip. Shortly thereafter, however, the woman disobeys her husband and overturns a buffalo chip thereby revealing a hole in the sky. Because of her disobedience, Sun decides to send her back to earth and tells her to begin preparing a long rope from buffalo sinews. Alas, the rope she prepares for her descent proves to be too short:

⁹¹ R. Schukies, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

⁹² G. Grinnell, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

⁹³ H. Alexander, “North American,” in L. Gray ed., *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston, 1917), p. 93, citing the Pawnee priest Tahirussawichi.

⁹⁴ T. McCleary, *The Stars We Know: Crow Indian Astronomy and Lifeways* (Prospect Heights, 1997), p. 38.

“It turned out that she left out one sinew, so she could not quite reach the ground, and because of the condition being violated he couldn’t bring them back. He goes through the agony of deciding what to do, ‘If I save my son, I’ll have to destroy her.’ He picks up a rock and throws it at his wife. He strikes her with the rock. It strikes her and kills her, knocking her to the ground, but the baby is okay. Now, the little guy doesn’t have a mother, so he’s literally lost. In his sleep a snake gets into his skull. Pretty soon the snakes multiply...He’s going crazy until the father looks down and sees that this can’t go on forever. So, to save his son, he literally kills him by making it so stormy and so wet that the boy drowns...Then he clears up the skies and makes it so hot that the boy literally bakes.”⁹⁵

It will be noticed that the Crow Morning Star, much like the Greek Phaethon and Kwakiutl Mink, is described as suffering alternately from being scorched and from drowning (or from falling into a body of water). The Mexican Morning Star Quetzalcoatl, similarly, not only suffers immolation but he was also described as floating about in the flood-waters of Creation.⁹⁶

The Crow tradition that the Morning Star fell from heaven—closely paralleled by the Cheyenne myth surrounding Motseyoef—confirms that the mythical Morning Star was conceptualized as a formerly fallen star. In fact, such traditions are surprisingly widespread among the native peoples of North America. Witness the following tradition from the Jicarilla Apache:

“When Morning Star got directly over the holy place he threw himself down as a meteor. And when Morning Star flew down, the light flashed all over.”⁹⁷

Similar conceptions are evident in the Skidi traditions surrounding Morning Star: Witness the tradition that he originated from a meteor or falling star: “Now they sang of the origin of the Morning Star itself that they thought had come from a meteor.”⁹⁸ Morning Star himself was identified by some with one particularly large meteor that was treasured by the tribe as a magical talisman: “This meteor was carried by these people wherever they went, the old people believing

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹⁶ D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* (New York, 1985), p. 73. See also S. Milbrath, *Star Gods of the Maya* (Austin, 1999), p. 184.

⁹⁷ M. Opler & E. Opler, *Myths and Tales of the Jicarilla Apaches* (London, 1994), p. 175.

⁹⁸ G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 113.

it was part of the Morning-Star.”⁹⁹ A curious datum from George Dorsey’s field-notes is also relevant here: “It is interesting to observe that the great comet of 1882 was believed by the Skidi to be the Morning-Star, who is spoken of as *Opriiskisku*, the Downy-Feather-Star.”¹⁰⁰

The Salinan Indians from coastal California likewise appear to have preserved a reminiscence of the Morning Star’s fall from heaven, albeit in an abbreviated form. Witness the following tradition collected by John Mason: “In the beginning the morning star fell from heaven.”¹⁰¹

At this point an obvious question presents itself: Why would the Morning Star be likened to a falling star or meteor (see appendix one)?

⁹⁹ V. del Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁰ A field note quoted in V. del Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁰¹ J. Mason, “The Language of the Salinan Indians,” *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 14:1 (1918), p. 93, as told by José Cruz. Note: Special thanks to Rens van der Sluijs for bringing this tradition to my attention.

Chapter Five

Falling Star

“The kind of violation that Heraclitus envisions would throw the universe back into chaos, as would any deviation of the stars from the established path. In mythical thought, that threat to the balance of nature is embodied in Phaethon, who for that reason is an ideal foil for the image of a harmonious universe.”¹⁰²

“It is time to decide to pay more serious attention to the *sources* and to put an end to our suppression, out of prejudice, of half of the awe-inspiring things they contain.”¹⁰³

The myth of a Star-boy who falls from the sky is very widespread in aboriginal North America, although in many cases the boy’s identity with the mythical Morning Star has been lost. In several reflexes of the myth the young hero is denoted by a name signifying “Falling Star.” A Cheyenne tradition collected by George Grinnell is representative of this genre. As in other versions of the myth, the newly wed mortal bride is told not to dig a certain root and promptly disobeys, only to discover a hole beneath the root providing a view of the earth. Upon spying her former tribe’s campsite, she immediately becomes homesick and resolves to return, whereupon she begins “braiding a great long rope.”¹⁰⁴ Predictably, the rope proves to be too short to reach to earth:

“But when she got to the end of the rope, she found it was not long enough, and that she was still far above the earth...At last, however, she had to let go; and she fell, and the fall broke her all to pieces. Although the fall killed her, her unborn child did not die; he was made of stone, and the fall did not kill him.”¹⁰⁵

Shortly after crash-landing on Earth, the Star-boy sets out on a series of adventures, one of which finds him undergoing a Jonah-like experience within a mythical water monster named Mih’n.

¹⁰² G. Ferrari, *Alcman and the Cosmos of Sparta* (Chicago, 2008), p. 53.

¹⁰³ W. Otto, *Dionysus* (Bloomington, 1973), p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ G. Grinnell, “Falling-Star,” *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 34 (1921), p. 309.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309

As is often the case with such monsters, Mih'n had a nasty habit of cannibalizing trespassers attempting to obtain water:

“When his bucket was full, the mih'n raised its head above the water. It had a great mouth; and as it drew in its breath, the suction from the mouth drew in the boy...Now, when he was sucked in, the boy had his knife; and when he found himself inside the mih'n, he saw there all the people that had ever been swallowed by it. With his knife he cut a hole in the animal's side, and let out all the people.”¹⁰⁶

The resemblance between this tale and the aforementioned Cheyenne and Crow traditions surrounding the mythical Morning Star is patently obvious. Indeed, the Cheyenne themselves recognized a fundamental affinity between Motseyoef and “Falling Star,” as Schukies documented with reference to Grinnell's story: “As is pointed out by the Arrow Keeper Red Hat [Schukies' informant], this ‘falling star’ was Motseyoef.”¹⁰⁷

A Lakota myth reported by Ronald Goodman provides additional details of interest. In this reflex of the widespread Star Husband myth two mortal women marry stars. As in previously cited versions of the story, the women are ordered not to dig any wild turnips but soon disobey, with predictable results:

“Eventually one of them does [violate the injunction], and as she pulls out the turnip, a hole opens in the northern circumpolar star world. She is able to look down and see the earth, and even her own village. She becomes homesick and decides to return to earth. She braids more and more turnips to make a rope and lets herself down through the hole. But the braid doesn't reach the earth and she falls. The crash kills her, but her baby is born.”¹⁰⁸

The baby in question is named *wicahpi hinhpaya*, “Fallen Star.” As is frequently the case with mythical heroes, the star-boy's divine nature soon manifests itself:

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁰⁷ R. Schukies, *Red Hat* (Hamburg, 1993), p. 192.

¹⁰⁸ R. Goodman, *Lakota Star Knowledge* (Mission, South Dakota, 1992), p. 3.

“Fallen Star matures rapidly—in days rather than years. He is taller than normal and a light emanates from him...Fallen Star, the protector, the bringer of light.”¹⁰⁹

In the epithet “bringer of light” we recognize a familiar epithet of the mythical Morning Star in sacred lore the world over. An analogous epithet came to denote the Morning Star in ancient Greek tradition—*Phosphoros*—literally, “light bringer (or bearer).”¹¹⁰

After a number of harrowing adventures, Fallen Star eventually announces his intention to leave this world and return to the stars:

“Fallen Star climbs a hill at night with a friend. He tells the friend he is going to return home. Fallen Star lays down on the hilltop and dies. His spirit is seen as a light ascending into the star world.”¹¹¹

In summary: The striking resemblance between Falling Star and the Cheyenne Motseyoef leads us to deduce that the former hero, like the latter, is to be identified with the Morning Star. The same deduction follows from the report that the Lakota “Fallen Star” was also known as “light-bringer.” Most important, perhaps, is the fact that these traditions linking the Amerindian “Morning Star” to a spectacular fall from heaven provide compelling support for the thesis that this particular Star formed the celestial prototype for the Greek Phaethon traditions as well as the Phaethonesque-figures from British Columbian lore.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1985), p. 878. W. Eilers, *Sinn und Herkunft der Planetennamen* (München, 1976), p. 57.

¹¹¹ R. Goodman, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Chapter Six

The Milky Way

“This was once the Path Where Phoebus drove; and that in length of Years The heated track took Fire and burnt the Stars...Besides, Fame tells, by Age Fame reverend grown, That Phoebus gave his Chariot to his Son...Then from the scatter’d Chariot Lightning came, And the whole Skies were one continued Flame. The World took Fire, and in new kindled Stars The bright remembrance of its Fate it bears.”¹¹²

“I am inclined to surmise that the Galaxy at one time played a considerable role in the myth of Phaethon.”¹¹³

“In early Greek poetry myth and philosophy are not so easily disentangled. One thinks of the legend of Phaethon, for instance.”¹¹⁴

In his *Astronomica*, presumably written either during or shortly after the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, the learned historian of ancient lore Manilius briefly recounted the myth of Phaethon, wherein he reported the common belief that the Milky Way was formed in the wake of the doomed charioteer’s fiery fall from heaven (see the quote above). Aristotle is the primary (and earliest) source for this important bit of information, although Diodorus and others also reference the same tradition:

“The so-called Pythagoreans give two explanations [for the origin of the Milky Way]. Some say that the Milky Way is the path taken by one of the stars at the time of the legendary fall of Phaethon; others say that it is the circle in which the sun once moved. And the region is supposed to have been scorched or affected in some other such way as a result of the passage of these bodies.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.730-749 as translated in G. de Santillana & H. von Dechend, *Hamlet’s Mill* (Boston, 1969), pp. 250-251.

¹¹³ A.B. Cook, *Zeus, Vol. I* (London, 1964), p. 476.

¹¹⁴ G. Ferrari, *Alcman and the Cosmos of Sparta* (Chicago, 2008), p. 34.

¹¹⁵ *Meteorologica* 1.8.354a.

There can be no doubting the fact that Aristotle is here relating extremely archaic traditions. Aëtius (ca. 50-100 CE) preserves a very similar account of the Milky Way's origin:

“Of the Pythagoreans some explain the Milky Way as due to the burning-up of a star which fell out of its proper place and set on fire the region through which it circulated during the conflagration caused by Phaethon; others say that the sun's course originally lay along the Milky Way. Some, again, say that it is the mirrored image of the sun as it reflects its rays at the heaven, the process being the same as with the rainbow on the clouds.”¹¹⁶

If Phaethon is to be identified with the planet Venus, as conventional opinion assures us, how might this ancient tradition be interpreted? It is telling that not one of the numerous modern commentators on the Greek Phaethon myth has offered a single sentence about how this curious tradition is to be explained by reference to the familiar appearance or behavior of Venus. Could this be because the Pythagorean tradition necessarily implies a catastrophic context for Phaethon's fall from heaven? Clearly this is the plain meaning of Aristotle's words, for how else could the Milky Way have been formed or “scorched” as a result of the calamitous events associated with Phaethon's fateful ride?¹¹⁷

The fact that analogous reports are preserved from the New World lends credence to the essential trustworthiness of the Pythagorean traditions. Thus the Amahuaca of South America echo the ancient Greeks in describing the Milky Way as the former pathway of the Sun. Witness the report of the anthropologist Peter Roe: “The Amahuaca call the Milky Way the ‘trail or path of the Sun.’”¹¹⁸ The very same conception is found amongst the Rundi of South Africa, who designate the Milky Way as “the sun's track.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Aët. iii. 1.2 as translated in T. L. Heath, *Aristarchus of Samos* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 119.

¹¹⁷ Theony Condos, *The Katasterismoi of the Pseudo-Eratosthenes: A Mythological Commentary and English Translation* (Los Angeles, 1970), a dissertation presented to the University of Southern California, p. 226 summarizes the Greek opinion as follows: “Some of the Pythagoreans believed the Milky Way to be the result of the burning up of a star.”

¹¹⁸ P. Roe, “Mythic Substitution and the Stars...,” in V. Del Chamberlain et al, *Songs From the Sky* (Austin, 2005), p. 218.

¹¹⁹ H. von Sicard, “Karanga Stars,” *NADA* 9:3 (1966), p. 52.

Such traditions are especially significant because the present Sun *does not* travel along the path of the Milky Way—far from it, in fact.¹²⁰ Indeed, the familiar solar orb travels along the ecliptic and is only visible during the daylight hours; the Milky Way, on the other hand, occupies an area quite distinct from the ecliptic and is only visible at night. Thus it would be wholly contrary to natural experience to say that the Sun travels along the path of the Milky Way. Why, then, would the ancient Greeks, Amahuaca, and Rundi make precisely this claim?

Equally anomalous from the perspective of conventional astronomy are those mythical traditions which report that the Morning Star formerly traveled along the same celestial path. According to the Passamaquoddy Indians from the Eastern Coastline of America, the Morning Star (M'Surtu) travels along the “path called *Ketagûswôt* or the Spirit's Path (the Milky Way).”¹²¹ On the opposite coast, the Maidu Indians of Northern California also link the Morning Star to the Milky Way: “*La ídam-lülü bô* (Morning Star's Trail) is the Milky Way.”¹²² The same association is found amongst the Cakchiquel of Guatemala: They describe the Morning Star by the name Santiago and report that the Milky Way was known as the “Road of Santiago.”¹²³

In light of the Amerindian traditions describing the Phaethonesque hero as climbing a chain of arrows, it is relevant to note that cultures around the globe represented the Milky Way as a ladder-to-heaven. In Acoma (Pueblo) sandpaintings, for example, the Milky Way is depicted as a ladder “for it is thought that these stars form a bridge to the heavens.”¹²⁴ So, too, Navaho sandpaintings represent the Milky Way as shaped like a zigzagging lattice-like structure.¹²⁵ These artworks, in turn, recall a tradition from the neighboring Piman Indians of California describing the ladder-to-heaven as “the zigzag ladder.”¹²⁶

¹²⁰ E. Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon* (New York, 1991), p. 269 acknowledges the point: “The sun must confine itself to the ecliptic, a path through the stars that does not coincide with the Milky Way.”

¹²¹ D. Miller, *Stars of the First People* (Boulder, 1997), p. 42.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹²³ S. Milbrath, *Star Gods of the Maya* (Austin, 1999), pp. 34, 41.

¹²⁴ D. Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹²⁵ See the sandpainting reproduced in B. Haile, *op. cit.*, p. 15. See also T. Griffin-Pierce, *Earth is My Mother, Sky is My Father: Space, Time, and Astronomy in Navaho Sandpainting* (Norman, 1992), p. 85.

¹²⁶ T. Hoskinson, “Saguaro Wine,” in R. Williamson & C. Farrer, *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 136.

Given the traditions identifying the Milky Way as a road of the sun, it is significant to find the ladder-to-heaven described in similar terms. In Zuñi lore, for example, the Morning Star is reported to have created a ladder of arrows to heaven in order to form a “road to the sun”:

“Morning Star, looking on, saw that they were losing the battle. He called to his younger brother and said, ‘Let us go to our sun father and see if he can tell us how to help our friends.’ They took corn meal and turquoise and put it upon their arrows. They shot toward the sun making a road to the sun of the dust. They climbed this.”¹²⁷

Although such traditions form an intriguing parallel to Aristotle’s claim with respect to Phaethon’s intimate connection with the Milky Way, they stand in marked contradiction to astronomical reality insofar as the present Morning Star (i.e., Venus) does not travel along the Milky Way. How, then, are we to explain such traditions, found in the New World as well as the Old?

A decisive clue is provided by the fact that the planet Mars was renowned for ascending the ladder-to-heaven *in illo tempore*.¹²⁸ Indeed, according to the Makiritare tradition quoted earlier, it was the red planet that created the ladder-to-heaven, the so-called “road to Heaven”:

“We’re going to heaven. Okay. Who’ll go? Who’ll be first? Who’s going with the arrows?” There was another man named Ahishama. He was very wise. “Can you?” Wlaha asked? “I’ll go,” Ahishama answered...He turned him into a bird. He was beautiful, brilliant, with orange-colored feathers, and very fast and light. His name was Ahishama, the troupiat [a species of bird]. There was another man. “Can you?” “I’ll go.” He turned him into a frog...They called him Kütto...Wlaha shot. The arrow sped out. It flew up. Troupiat flew up. Frog leapt. Wlaha screamed: “Fly! Jump! Catch it! Tie it! Ahishama was carrying the end of a vine in his beak. We call that vine he had sahudiwa, vine-chain. It’s a long, long vine, all wrinkled and creased...The seven Wlaha shot another arrow and then another and another. Seven arrows in all. They hung there in space, seven rungs tied to that big vine. It was the ladder, the road to

¹²⁷ A. Risser, “Seven Zuñi Folk Tales,” *El Palacio* 48 (1941), p. 224.

¹²⁸ E. Cochrane, “The Stairway to Heaven,” *Aeon* 5:1 (1997), pp. 69-78.

Heaven. That Troupial and Frog built. Ahishama and Kütto. They climbed up without a ladder. When they built it there was no road.

They were the first ones to arrive. Right away they changed. They started shining. They were the first two stars in the black night. The very first was Ahishama, then Kütto. Now that Troupial named Ahishama burns orange (Mars). He built the ladder in space. That's what they say."¹²⁹

If nothing else, this Makiritare tradition bolsters our claim that astronomical imagery informs the ancient myths. Noteworthy also is the brilliant beauty ascribed to Ahishama/Mars, reminiscent of the extraordinary handsomeness ascribed to the ladder-climbing Phaethon of Bella Coola lore.

The Makiritare account of the ladder-climbing Mars raises the distinct possibility that the ladder-climbing "Morning Star" of Zuñi lore—like the Skidi "Morning Star"—is to be identified with the planet Mars. Indeed, Barbara Tedlock reports that the Zuñi Morning Star was occasionally identified with the red planet.¹³⁰ It is evident, in any case, that the Zuñi Morning Star offers a striking resemblance to the Skidi Mars. The Zuñi Star, like the Skidi Mars, was regarded as the patron god of warriors.¹³¹ It is also telling that the Zuñi name for the Morning Star translates as "Great Star,"¹³² a common name for the Morning Star throughout the Americas and one that is exactly paralleled amongst the Skidi Pawnee, who likewise singled out that particular Star for his greatness. Thus a Skidi tradition makes the Morning Star Mars announce: "I am the Great Star (*Upirikutsu*)."¹³³

The Skidi Morning Star, as we have documented, was intimately associated with the prototypical fire-drill. It was the Morning Star, in fact, who was credited with drilling the first fire at the time of Creation, a deed commemorated in Skidi rituals and believed to bring fertility to the land:

¹²⁹ M. de Civrieux, *Watunna: An Orinoco Creation Cycle* (San Francisco, 1980), pp. 113-114.

¹³⁰ B. Tedlock, "Zuñi Sacred Theater," *American Indian Quarterly* 7 (1983), p. 100.

¹³¹ D. Miller, *Stars of the First People* (Boulder, 1997), p. 181.

¹³² J. Young, "Morning Star, Evening Star: Zuñi Traditional Stories," in R. Williamson and C. Farrer eds., *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 76. See also J. Carlson, "Transformations of the Mesoamerican Venus Turtle Carapace War Shield," in V. del Chamberlain et al eds., *Songs From the Sky* (College Park, 2005), p. 115.

¹³³ G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 106.

“The Skiri [Skidi] also conceive of the firesticks as male and female. The idea is that the kindling of fire symbolized the vitalizing of the world as recounted in the creation. Specifically, the hearth represents the Evening Star and the drill the Morning Star in the act of creation.”¹³⁴

Analogous conceptions are associated with the Morning Star in Zuñi ritual. Hence we learn that “the rising of the Morning Star during the winter solstice ceremony marked the time for the kindling of the New Year fire.”¹³⁵ For the Zuñi, as for the Skidi, the drilling of the sacred fire was intimately linked with the fertility of the land.¹³⁶

In view of the evidence enumerated above, the overlap in traditions between the Skidi Pawnee and Zuñi suggests some sort of historical connection or cultural exchange between the two tribes. If the Zuñi Morning Star can be identified with the planet Mars, as seems probable, it stands to reason that the same holds true with respect to the ladder-climbing “Phaethons” of Bella Coola and Kwakiutl lore.

To return to the myth of Phaethon: If the “Morning Star” of ancient myth is to be identified with the planet Mars, as argued here, it stands to reason that the red planet might be mentioned in ancient traditions surrounding the Milky Way—this despite the fact that this outer planet, like Venus, travels along the ecliptic and *not along the galaxy*. Yet this is exactly what we find. Thus the Aboriginal Yaraldi from South Australia maintain that the planet Mars, as the prototypical hero Waiyungari, resides in the Milky Way.¹³⁷ This report, in turn, finds a possible parallel in the sacred lore of the Skidi Pawnee, wherein we learn that Morning Star’s “constellation” lies in the Milky Way.¹³⁸

As I have documented elsewhere, the planet Mars features prominently in several myths describing the origin of the Milky Way.¹³⁹ In ancient Armenia, for example, the Milky Way’s

¹³⁴ J. Murie, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹³⁵ M. Jane Young, “Morning Star, Evening Star: Zuñi Traditional Stories,” in R. Williamson & C. Farrer eds., *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 79. See also E. Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion, Vol. I* (Lincoln, 1939), p. 576.

¹³⁶ J. Frazer, *Balder the Beautiful* (London, 1963), p. 133.

¹³⁷ P. A. Clarke, “The Aboriginal Cosmic Landscape of Southern South Australia,” *Records of the South Australian Museum* 29:2 (1997), p. 138.

¹³⁸ R. Williamson, *Living the Sky* (Norman, 1984), p. 224.

origin was ascribed to the warrior-hero Vahagn who allegedly scattered it across the sky while attempting to escape from his pursuers upon being discovered stealing straw: “On a cold winter night Vahagn stole some hay from Barsham and in his hurry to slip away some of the hay was scattered about...the resultant constellation became known as the ‘pathway of the hay-thief,’ which is the traditional Armenian name for the Milky Way.”¹⁴⁰ Yet Vahagn himself was explicitly identified with the planet Mars as early as the second century BCE.¹⁴¹

In ancient Greece the Milky Way was said to have originated when the infant Heracles tugged at the breast of Hera while nursing, spilling her milk and thereby forming a luminous path in heaven—*kuklos galaxias*, circle of milk:

“It was not possible for the sons of Zeus to share in heavenly honor before one of them had been nursed by Hera. And so they say that Hermes brought Herakles just after his birth and placed him at Hera’s breast, and that he was nursed by her. When Hera discovered the trick she pushed Herakles away and the remaining milk was spilled, forming the Galaxy.”¹⁴²

Yet Heracles himself was also identified with the planet Mars, this identification being commonplace in Hellenistic times.¹⁴³

A fascinating story regarding the Milky Way’s origin is told by the Navaho Indians of the American Southwest. In a tale that has been called “the best known story in ethnoastronomy,”¹⁴⁴ the wily trickster Coyote interrupted Creation—“Coyote queered things in the beginning”—and maliciously scattered the Milky Way before setting his own star within its midst.¹⁴⁵

Significantly, Coyote’s star was red in color:

¹³⁹ E. Cochrane, “The Milky Way,” *Aeon* 4:4 (1996), pp. 39-66.

¹⁴⁰ A. Hacıyan et al eds., *The Heritage of Armenian Literature, Vol. 1* (New York, 2000), p. 67, citing the 7th century report of the astronomer Anania Shirakatsi.

¹⁴¹ B. L. van der Waerden, *Science Awakening II: The Birth of Astronomy* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 187-190.

¹⁴² T. Condos, *The Katasterismoi of the Pseudo-Eratosthenes*, a dissertation presented to the University of Southern California (1970), p. 224, citing *Katasterismoi* 43.

¹⁴³ Pliny, *Natural History* II:34; Hyginus, *Poetica Astronomica* II:42. See also the discussion in A. Scherer, *Gestirnnamen bei den indogermanischen Völkern* (Heidelberg, 1953), pp. 94-95.

¹⁴⁴ R. Pinxten & I. Van Dooren, “Navajo Earth and Sky,” in R. Williamson & C. Farrer, *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 108.

¹⁴⁵ B. Haile, *Starlore Among the Navaho* (Sante Fe, 1977), p. 28.

“The Holy People were placing the stars. *Ma’ii* (Coyote) came in and got annoyed by their slowness. He picked out a red star (*ma’ii sq*) from the bag with stars and placed it in the south. He said, ‘This is going to be my star.’ He took the bag of stars and threw it over his head. That is how *Yikaisdáhi* (Milky Way) was formed...Because Coyote picked his star in such a way, he said it would announce trouble, war or bad times.”¹⁴⁶

The Navaho tradition reporting that Coyote’s “red star” announces trouble or war mirrors ancient conceptions associated with the planet Mars. In ancient China, for example, Mars was believed to portend war and disorder: “(Mars) governs states that lack the Way, Causing disorder, robbery, sickness, mourning, famine, and warfare.”¹⁴⁷ It will be noted that the Chinese belief crediting the red planet with causing disorder is precisely paralleled in Navaho tradition, wherein Coyote’s “big red star” was known as the “Patron of Disorder.”¹⁴⁸

The Chinese traditions regarding the origin of the Milky Way are also of interest here. The *Soochow Astronomical Chart* (ca. 1193 AD) describes the Milky Way as originating from the asterism *Shun-huo*, “Fire of the Phoenix”:

“At the center of Shun-Huo is the fire star, Alphard. A mythical bird of the phoenix type dwelt in the sun and illumined the heavens with its flight, producing the luminous Milky Way.”¹⁴⁹

Far from alluding to the relatively unimpressive Alphard, the reference to a “fire star” at the center of *Shun-Huo* almost certainly points to the planet Mars, commonly described as *huo hsing*—literally “fire star”—in Chinese astronomical texts from all periods.¹⁵⁰ Hence when we read that a “fire star” was associated with the site of the Milky Way’s origin—i.e., *Shun-huo*, the

¹⁴⁶ R. Pinxten & I. Van Dooren, “Navajo Earth and Sky,” in R. Williamson & C. Farrer, *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 108.

¹⁴⁷ J. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought* (Buffalo, 1993), p. 74.

¹⁴⁸ T. Griffin-Pierce, “Ethnoastronomy in Navaho Sandpaintings of the Heavens,” in *Archaeoastronomy* 9 (1986), p. 63. See also the same author’s *Earth is My Mother, Sky is My Father: Space, Time, and Astronomy in Navaho Sandpainting* (Norman, 1992), p. 88.

¹⁴⁹ W. Rufus & H. Tien, *The Soochow Astronomical Chart* (Ann Arbor, 1945), p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ K. T’ien-fu, “A Summary of the Contents of the Ma-Wang-Tui Silk Scroll...,” *Chinese Studies in Archaeology* 1 (1979), p. 69.

so-called “Fire” or “Heart” of the Phoenix—this most likely testifies to the fact that the planet Mars was formerly conceptualized as residing in the immediate vicinity of the *mythical* Milky Way.

What, then, can be said with respect to the Chinese report that the Milky Way originated with the incendiary flight of a Phoenix-like bird, the legendary *feng huang*? There is good reason to believe that the Chinese Phoenix is to be identified with the planet Mars. Here it is instructive to find that ancient Chinese sources report that a fire-red god—explicitly identified with the planet Mars—was embodied in a Phoenix-like form known as “Vermilion Bird.”¹⁵¹ Of this mythical bird, Edward Schafer writes that it was “Fiery glowing—the red crow; It is the germ of the sun; Vermilion feathers on cinnabar body; It is born in exceptional epochs.”¹⁵²

The report that the Vermilion bird appeared at “exceptional epochs” recalls similar reports about the mythical Phoenix of Classical antiquity, the latter of which was believed to appear at long intervals and to represent a symbol of “rebirth or renewal and of the start of a new era.”¹⁵³ The fact that the planet Mars is explicitly identified with the Phoenix-like Vermilion bird, coupled with the complementary report that a “fire-star” resides at the center of *Shun-huo*—i.e., the very place whence the Phoenix took flight, thereby producing the Milky Way—strongly suggests that the Chinese tradition describing the Milky Way’s origin preserves a vestigial reference to ancient conceptions surrounding the planet Mars and its incendiary history.

In summary: It is significant that not one of the archetypal traditions attached to the mythical Milky Way—its celebrated role as the road of the sun and other planetary bodies, its identification as a zigzagging ladder-to-heaven, its function as a conduit for departed souls, its origin in the burned out remains of Phaethon or some other celestial body, or its intimate association with the planet Mars—can be explained by reference to the familiar galaxy of modern astronomy. Far from describing the currently ordered solar system, the ancient

¹⁵¹ E. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird* (Berkeley, 1967), p. 125: “Mars, sometimes called ‘Fire Star,’ who represents the Fire-red God (Ch’ih Ti)... ‘The Fire-red God is embodied in a Vermilion Bird.’” See also J. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought* (Albany, 1993), p. 71.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹⁵³ R. Clark, “The Origin of the Phoenix,” *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 2 (1949/50), p. 3. See also R. van den Broek, “Phoenix,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 1236 where he observes that the phoenix was a “popular symbol of the beginning of a new era.”

mythological traditions describing a “Milky Way” functioning as a ladder-to-heaven constitute compelling evidence that the ancient sky was radically different in appearance from that known to modern astronomers. Ancient traditions of a “Milky Way” doubling as a ladder-to-heaven, like the archetypal traditions describing it as a path for the Morning Star or departed souls, are a patent reference to the *axis mundi* or World Pillar thought to unite heaven and earth in former times. It is our view, in fact, that ancient myths describing the origin of the Milky Way commemorate and encode a witnessed event wherein a spectacular pillar-like apparition spanning heaven suddenly appeared in a decidedly cataclysmic context.¹⁵⁴ Prior to that awe-inspiring occasion no such celestial structure existed.

¹⁵⁴ E. Cochrane, “The Milky Way,” *Aeon* 4:4 (1996), pp. 39-66.

Chapter Seven

Aphrodite and Phaethon

“Phosphoros was said to be the child of Eos and Kephalos, as also was Phaethon in the story I shall now tell. In this story the star’s relationship with Aphrodite is of such a nature as to remind one of Adonis. The story of Phaethon should by rights be numbered amongst those concerning the great love-goddess’s paramours.”¹⁵⁵

“Modern civilization has stripped the old myths of their authority. It has thrown its lot with the cold, descriptive, Cartesian mind and only recognizes conceptual thinking.”¹⁵⁶

Hesiod and Pausanias both tell of a liaison between Aphrodite and a *dáimōn* named Phaethon (hereafter denoted Phaethon II). In their all-too-brief accounts Phaethon II is described as a youthful paramour of Aphrodite’s, whisked away to heaven to serve as an attendant in the goddess’s temple. The relevant passage from the *Theogony* reads as follows:

“And to Cephalus she [Eos] bare a splendid son, strong Phaëthon, a man like the gods, whom, when he was a young boy in the tender flower of glorious youth with childish thoughts, laughter-loving Aphrodite seized and caught up and made a keeper of her shrine by night, a divine spirit.”¹⁵⁷

It must be stated at the outset of our analysis that several renowned Classicists have denied that this Phaethon has any relationship to the infamous charioteer who shared the name. James Diggle is perhaps the most vocal proponent of this view:

“On the evidence available to us the son of Helios and the son of Eos and Cephalus must be pronounced to be entirely different persons. There is neither the means nor the necessity of reconciling them.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ C. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* (London, 1951), pp. 194-195.

¹⁵⁶ Vaclav Havel, *Thriller* (Warsaw, 1988), p. 151.

¹⁵⁷ *Theogony* 986-991 as translated by H. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Homeric* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 153.

¹⁵⁸ J. Diggle, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Martin West has since voiced a similar opinion.¹⁵⁹

Gregory Nagy, however, has criticized Diggle's view as being "overly prosopographical." Indeed, he would recognize a fundamental affinity between the two Phaethons: "We are not dealing with different persons, but with different myths, cognate variants, centering on the inherited personification of a solar child and consort."¹⁶⁰ Joseph Fontenrose offered a similar opinion: "Phaethon, son of the Dawn and Kephalos, must be in origin the same person, though different stories were told about him."¹⁶¹ Marinus van der Sluijs, in a more recent discussion of the evidence, concluded with respect to Euripides' play *Phaethon*: "Consequently, at least to Euripides' mind, the Phaethon that fell down from the sky was identical with the Phaethon united in marriage with Aphrodite."¹⁶²

It was Nagy who pointed the way to a successful resolution of Phaethon's original identity. In a seminal article originally published in 1973, Nagy drew attention to a number of thematic parallelisms shared between Phaethon II, Phaon, and Adonis.¹⁶³ In addition to being strikingly beautiful in appearance and beloved by Aphrodite, each of the three heroes was hidden by the Greek goddess:

"Since the epithet *múkhios* 'secreted' as applied to Phaethon in *Theogony* 991 implies that he was hidden by Aphrodite, we see here an important parallelism with Phaon and Adonis, who were also hidden by Aphrodite."¹⁶⁴

Central to Nagy's analysis is the assumption that Aphrodite and Phaethon II represent two different celestial bodies. Aphrodite, according to Nagy, personifies the planet Venus while Phaethon—like Adonis—represents the sun. It naturally follows, according to this logic, that the

¹⁵⁹ *Theogony and Works and Days* (Oxford, 1988), p. 73: "Apparently a different person from the Phaëthon who was son of the Sun."

¹⁶⁰ G. Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), pp. 254-255.

¹⁶¹ J. Fontenrose, *Orion* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 103.

¹⁶² M. A. van der Sluijs, "On the Wings of Love," *JANER* 8:2 (2008), p. 231.

¹⁶³ G. Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973), pp. 137-177. Nagy's article was subsequently republished in slightly modified form as "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas: 'Reading' the Symbols of Greek Lyric," in E. Greene ed., *Reading Sappho* (Berkeley, 1996), pp. 35-57.

¹⁶⁴ *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), p. 255.

various interactions between Phaethon and Aphrodite are to be understood as an allegorized account of solar behavior:

“We come now to the association of Phaethon with Aphrodite in *Theogony* 988-991. It arises, I propose, from a sexual theme implicit in a solar transition from death to rebirth. In the logic of the myth, it appears that the setting sun mates with a goddess of regeneration so that the rising sun may be reborn. If the setting sun is the same as the rising sun, then the goddess of regeneration may be viewed as both mate and mother.”¹⁶⁵

Although we readily agree that Phaethon and Aphrodite represent different celestial bodies, we would deny Nagy’s central thesis that the Phaethon myth is modeled on the stereotypical behavior of the sun. Here it would appear that Nagy failed to adequately explore the striking parallelisms he had discovered between Phaethon II and Adonis. Had he done so, he would have realized that Adonis has nothing whatsoever to do with the familiar solar orb; rather, he represents another celestial body altogether (see below).

There are hints that the Greeks of the Hellenistic period identified Phaethon II and Adonis. According to the *Etymologicum Magnum*, Kephalos and Eos—Phaethon’s parents, according to Hesiod—had a son named Aôos. As Joseph Fontenrose observed, Aôos would seem to be but another name for Adonis:

“We are also told that Kephalos and Eos had a son named Aôos...He was the first king of Cyprus. His name is apparently a Cyprian-dialect form of *Êdios* or *Hedios*, the adjective formed from *Eôs*, *Heôs*, meaning ‘of the dawn’ or ‘eastern.’ This seems to be another name for Phaethon...In the entry *Aôos* in the *Etymologicon Magnum* (117), we are told that Aô (Aôos?) was a name of Adonis...Adonis was, like Phaethon, an object of Aphrodite’s love; he was beautiful.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ G. Nagy, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

¹⁶⁶ J. Fontenrose, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

The name of the Cypriote king recalls the fact that Heosphoros was the earliest attested name for the Morning Star in Greek sources, being already commonplace in both Hesiod and Homer. Conceptualized as masculine in nature, Heosphoros was renowned as a light-bringer and for announcing the dawn. Thus Homer writes as follows in his most famous work: “At that time when the dawn star passes across earth, harbinger of light, and after him dawn of the saffron mantle is scattered across the sea.”¹⁶⁷

Granted that Phaethon II shares a fundamental affinity with Adonis—and the fact can scarcely be denied—the question arises: With which celestial body is Adonis to be identified?

¹⁶⁷ *Iliad* 23:226.

Chapter Eight

Adonis

“Bethlehem which is now ours, the most august place in the universe...was shaded by the sacred wood of Tammuz, that is, Adonis. And in the grotto where the newborn Christ once cried, there were tears for the lover of Venus.”¹⁶⁸

“Look, how a bright star shooteth from the sky, So glides he in the night from Venus’ eye.”¹⁶⁹

The testimony of St. Jerome, taken together with that of numerous other ancient chroniclers, hints at Adonis’s former exalted status. What, then, do we know about Aphrodite’s celebrated paramour?

According to Panyassis (early 5th century BCE), the newborn Adonis was so beautiful that Aphrodite jealously hid him away in a coffin (*lárnax*). After handing him over to Persephone for safekeeping, Aphrodite was subsequently heartbroken upon learning that the goddess of the underworld refused to give him up. Apollodorus told the story as follows:

“Struck by his beauty, Aphrodite, in secret from the gods, hid him in a chest while he was still a little child, and entrusted him to Persephone. But when Persephone caught sight of him, she refused to give him back. The matter was submitted to the judgment of Zeus; and dividing the year into three parts, he decreed that Adonis should spend a third of the year by himself, a third with Persephone, and the remaining third with Aphrodite...Later, however, while he was hunting, Adonis was wounded by a boar and died.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ St. Jerome, *Letters* 58, 3 as translated by R. Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1996), p. 148.

¹⁶⁹ Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* as translated by Douglas Bush, “Venus and Adonis and Mythology,” in P. Kolin ed., *Venus and Adonis: Critical Essays* (New York, 1997), p. 92.

¹⁷⁰ Apollodorus, *The Library* III:14:4 as translated in R. Hand ed., *The Library of Greek Mythology* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 131-132.

Although there are conflicting reports about the precise manner of the god's death, it is generally agreed that he died while still young and under tragic circumstances. In one version of the myth Aphrodite is said to have leapt off the Leucadian rock out of grief for the beautiful youth.¹⁷¹

Aphrodite's passion for Adonis is attested as early as Sappho (ca. 600 BCE). In a fragment attributed to the melancholy poet of Lesbos, one finds an early reference to the ritual lamentations that distinguished the god's cult:

"He is dying, O Cytherean, the tender Adonis! What shall we do? Beat your breasts, young maidens, and tear your tunics!"¹⁷²

Bion, writing in the mid-second century BCE, composed a lengthy poem recounting Adonis's tragic fate. In his account it is the goddess Aphrodite herself who bloodied her breasts while mourning the youth's death:

"But Aphrodite, having let down her hair, rushes through the woods mourning, unbraided, unsandaled; and the thorns cut her as she goes and pluck sacred blood. Shrilly wailing, through long winding dells she wanders, crying out the Assyrian cry, calling her consort and boy. Around her floated her dark robe at her navel; her chest was made scarlet by her hands; the breasts below, snowy before, grew crimson for Adonis."¹⁷³

The wailing rites alluded to by Sappho and Bion betray the telltale influence of Dumuzi's cult, wherein lamentations featured prominently.¹⁷⁴ The rites in question are first attested in Mari during the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1800-1600 BCE), but undoubtedly go back much further still—likely to the dawn of civilization itself. Lamentations for the god are most familiar from the testimony of Ezekiel, who wrote as follows of the abominations then afflicting Jerusalem: "Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz."¹⁷⁵ The stubborn persistence of such beliefs

¹⁷¹ See the discussion in L. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States, Vol. II* (New Rochelle, 1977), p. 650.

¹⁷² Fragment 152 as translated in R. Turcan, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

¹⁷³ *Epitaph on Adonis*, lines 19-27 as quoted in J. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 123-125.

¹⁷⁴ W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 177. See also his *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 108-111.

is evidenced by the fact that Sabeian women performed similar rites in Harran as late as the tenth century CE.¹⁷⁶

The Adonis-myth formed the subject of several Greek rituals during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.¹⁷⁷ Women were the primary participants in the rites in question, known as Adonia, which were typically celebrated on rooftops, thereby emulating the Oriental custom. Interestingly, ladders formed a conspicuous element in the god's cult:

“According to textual evidence, Adonis rites were performed on the roofs of houses. The iconography contains some striking scenes in which ladders are outstanding features.”¹⁷⁸

In Athens, the Adonia featured the parading forth of the god's body and its burial, followed by a period of general licentiousness marked by drinking and dancing.¹⁷⁹ Alas, further details are lacking with regards to the precise order and content of the Attic rites. Walter Burkert emphasized the link with the ancient Near East in his summary of Adonis's cult in ancient Greece:

“There remain enough lacunae and uncertainties in our knowledge. Still we can feel confident as to the general outline: the yearly festival of weeping for Tammuz spread from Mesopotamia to Syria to Palestine, and thence, with the name ‘Adonis,’ to Greece. At Jerusalem, as still in fifth-century Athens, this is not an established state festival, but an unofficial ceremony spontaneously performed by women, and viewed with suspicion by the dominant male.”¹⁸⁰

Outside of Greece proper, there is evidence that the cult of Adonis was once widely disseminated throughout the Mediterranean region. In Rome, as in Athens, Adonia were celebrated.

¹⁷⁵ *Ezekiel* 8:14.

¹⁷⁶ B. Alster, “Tammuz,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 1569.

¹⁷⁷ S. Ribichini, “Adonis,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), cols. 12-17. See also L. Reitzammer, *The Athenian Adonia in Context* (Madison, 2016).

¹⁷⁸ T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection* (Stockholm, 2001), p. 127. On the iconography of the ladder in the Adonia, see R. Rosenzweig, *Worshipping Aphrodite* (Ann Arbor, 2004), pp. 63-68.

¹⁷⁹ F. Graf, “Aphrodite,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 120.

¹⁸⁰ W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, 1979), p. 107.

Numerous Roman murals, according to Robert Turcan, show “Adonis being carried away by Venus.”¹⁸¹ The love affair between Adonis and Aphrodite was also a familiar subject on Etruscan mirrors from the fourth century BCE.

Adonis was especially popular at Byblos, a Phoenician stronghold of great antiquity.¹⁸² Indeed, there is much reason to believe that Adonis was Astarte’s youthful consort at Byblos. An eyewitness to the raucous rites practiced there—Lucian (2nd Century CE)—reported that the god experienced a resurrection:

“As a memorial of his suffering each year they beat their breasts, mourn and celebrate the rites. Throughout the land they perform solemn lamentations. When they cease their breast-beating and weeping, they first sacrifice to Adonis as if to a dead person, but then, on the next day, they proclaim that he lives and send him into the air.”¹⁸³

Origen (3rd century CE) likewise testifies to Adonis’s resurrection in ancient cult:

“The god whom the Greeks called Adonis is called Tammuz by the Jews and the Syrians, as they say. It seems that certain sacred ceremonies are practiced each year; first, they weep for him as if he ceased to live; then they rejoice for him as if he had risen from the dead.”¹⁸⁴

Jerome, writing slightly later than Origen (ca. 345-419), provides complementary testimony in favor of a rite celebrating Adonis’s resurrection. Thus, in his commentary on Ezekiel, Jerome wrote as follows:

“What we have rendered as Adonis, the Hebrew and Syrian languages denote as Tammuz. According to a pagan tale, Venus’s lover, a very beautiful youth, is killed...After this, he is said to have risen...There is an annual celebration of his feast, in which women bewail him as dead,

¹⁸¹ R. Turcan, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹⁸² Vase fragments from the Fifth Dynasty reign of Unas have been found at Byblos. See W. Stevenson Smith, “The Old Kingdom in Egypt...,” in I. Edwards et al eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. 1:2 (Cambridge, 1971), p. 189.

¹⁸³ *De Dea Syria* 6.

¹⁸⁴ Sel. in *Ez.* 8:14 as quoted in S. Ribichini, *op. cit.*, col. 16.

and then he is praised in song when he returns to life...The same pagans interpret, in a subtle manner, the poets' narratives of a similar kind, narratives about shameful things: they understand the sequence of wailing and joy as referring to the death and resurrection of Adonis. They take his death to be shown by the seeds that die in the earth, and his resurrection by the crops in which the dead seeds are born."¹⁸⁵

Cyril of Alexandria, writing in the 5th century of the current era, commented on the Adonis rites then being celebrated in his native city. Cyril's disdain for the Greek ritual practices is everywhere apparent:

"They pretended to unite in weeping and lamentations with Aphrodite when she was mourning Adonis's death. Then, when she reappeared from the Netherworld and announced that she had found the one she had been looking for, [they pretended] to unite in rejoicing and jumping [for joy]. And even today this comedy is still being performed in the temples of Alexandria."¹⁸⁶

In addition to the ritual wailings, there is evidence that the Adonia featured a *hieros gamos* between the youthful hero and Aphrodite/Astarte. Such was the case in the rites practiced in Ptolemaic Alexandria, according to Theocritus (4th/5th century CE). Sergio Ribichini summarized the Alexandrian rites as follows:

"The first day the participants celebrated the union between the two lovers, represented in the course of a banquet under a kiosk of dill stems and surrounded by fruits, delightful gardens, pots of perfumes and a big variety of cakes. On the second day the epithalamium gave way to a lament as the worshippers gathered for a funeral procession to carry the image of Adonis to the seashore."¹⁸⁷

The sacred marriage between Aphrodite and Adonis can't help but recall the *hieros gamos* associated with the Sumerian Inanna and Dumuzi, wherein the Sumerian king, impersonating Dumuzi, sought to "marry" the planet Venus in order to legitimize his hold on the throne and

¹⁸⁵ *Explanations of Ezekiel* III, 8, 14 as quoted from T. Mettinger, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

¹⁸⁶ *In Isaiah* 18:1-2 as translated in T. Mettinger, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁸⁷ S. Ribichini, *op. cit.*, col. 13.

ensure fertility throughout the land.¹⁸⁸ Inasmuch as the Sumerian rite had its origin and *raison d'être* in ancient conceptions associated with the planet Venus (Inanna), one is naturally led to suspect that similar ideas informed the aboriginal cult of Aphrodite and Adonis.

That there was a celestial dimension to the Adonis myth is suggested by the fact that his rites were typically celebrated on rooftops. It was on rooftops, after all, that astronomical observations and offerings were commonly made throughout the ancient Near East.¹⁸⁹ Jeremiah's testimony is especially instructive in this regard:

“And the house of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods.”¹⁹⁰

The Judaic rites are reminiscent of practices associated with the worship of Inanna from more than a thousand years earlier. In the sacred marriage hymn of the Neo-Sumerian king Iddin-Dagan, for example, one reads that incense was offered to the planet Venus (Inanna) on the rooftops:

“Everybody hastens to holy Inana. For my lady in the midst of heaven the best of everything is prepared (?). In the pure places of the plain, at its good places, on the roofs, on the rooftops, the rooftops of dwellings (?), in the sanctuaries (?) of mankind, incense offerings like a forest of aromatic cedars are transmitted to her.”¹⁹¹

How, then, are we to understand the god behind these curious rites? As Ribichini points out with reference to the cult at Byblos, the name Adonis is most likely an epithet of a great god:

¹⁸⁸ D. Frayne, “Notes on The Sacred Marriage Rite,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 42:1/2 (1985), cols. 5-22; J. Klein, “Sacred Marriage,” in D. Freedman ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Vol. 5* (1992), pp. 866-870. See also E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 19-37.

¹⁸⁹ M. Weinfeld, “The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and its Background,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 4 (1972), pp. 151-154. See also *Zephaniah* 1:5.

¹⁹⁰ *Jeremiah*, 19:13.

¹⁹¹ Lines 142ff. in J. Black et al, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford, 2004), p. 266.

“He must indeed have been a god of high rank. It is probable that the cult of Adonis in Byblos continued the worship of a Phoenician ‘Baal’, conceived as a dying and rising god. This god was not merely a spring deity or vegetation spirit, as Frazer believed, but an important city god comparable to Melqart in Tyre and Eshmun in Sidon.”¹⁹²

Melqart, in fact, was addressed as *Adoni*, “my lord,” the epithet from which derives the name of Adonis.¹⁹³ At Tyre, Melqart was the beloved consort of Astarte/Venus, thereby occupying a position analogous to that of Adonis at Byblos.¹⁹⁴ Early on identified with Nergal, Melqart is best understood as a personification of the planet Mars.¹⁹⁵ The ancient Phoenician city of Tyre, moreover, was singled out for its worship of the red planet.¹⁹⁶ An Arabic author, writing in the first decades of the 14th century CE, offered direct testimony on the matter: “Among [the temples that were found] in the city of [Tyre], near the waterside, a temple of Mars.”¹⁹⁷

The author in question—Al-Dimashqi—goes on to state that Tammuz himself was to be identified with the planet Mars: “The Sabaeans contended that [Jerusalem] had been built before Solomon, peace be on him, and that the city had a temple of Mars where an idol called Tammuz was found.”¹⁹⁸ How or from what sources Al-Dimashqi derived this information is not clear. That said, the fact that the Greek astronomer Ptolemy identified Adonis with the red planet offers some support for Al-Dimashqi’s claim. Thus, in a discussion of the inhabitants of Syria in his *Tetrabiblos*, the greatest astronomer of the ancient world wrote as follows:

“Those who live in these countries generally worship Venus as the mother of the gods, calling her by various local names, and Mars as Adonis, to whom again they give other names, and they celebrate in their honour certain mysteries accompanied by lamentations.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² S. Ribichini, *op. cit.*, col. 14.

¹⁹³ KAI 47.

¹⁹⁴ T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection* (Stockholm, 2001), p. 126.

¹⁹⁵ S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford, 1989), p. 164 writes: “The name of Melqart, chief god of Tyre, is a Phoenician translation of the Sumerian name Nergal, and they are thus very closely assimilated.”

See also E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 42-48.

¹⁹⁶ H. Seyrig, “Antiquités Syriennes,” *Syria* 64 (1944-45), p. 70, cites Saleh ibn Yahya for the worship of Mars in Tyre.

¹⁹⁷ Quoted from J. Hjärpe, *Analyse Critique des Traditions Arabes sur les Sabéens Harraniens* (Uppsala, 1972), p. 75. Note: I am indebted to Rens van der Sluijs for this reference and the translation above.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ II, 3, 68. F. Robbins, translator, *Ptolemy: Tetrabiblos* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 146-149.

Ptolemy's primary works stem from the first half of the second century CE. The fact that he wrote from Alexandria, a hotbed of Adonis-worship, suggests that Ptolemy was uniquely qualified to comment on possible astronomical aspects of the Adonis-myth.

Chapter Nine

Aphrodite and Phaon

“As with the reconstruction of words, reconstruction of myths also depends on systematic and detailed comparison of numerous reflexes. And, again as with words, each reflex will differ in certain ways from every other, and from the reconstructed prototype as well.”²⁰⁰

A curious story, popular in Greek comedy and preserved in fragmentary fashion by various ancient writers, relates that Aphrodite once befriended an ugly old ferryman named Phaon after the latter had aided the goddess in crossing the Aegean. In return for his random act of kindness, the goddess rewarded the old man by magically transforming him into a handsome youth.²⁰¹

Gregory Nagy writes simply that Aphrodite conferred “youth and beauty on Phaon.”²⁰²

In addition to these basic facts there are hints that Aphrodite and Phaon were also lovers.

Athenaeus reports that the Cytherean goddess was in love with the ferryman, citing Kratinos, Euboulos and Callimachus as authorities.²⁰³ Kratinos wrote that Phaon was the most beautiful man on earth and that Aphrodite had hidden the youth away in order to keep him for herself.²⁰⁴

Although Palaephatos (late 4th century BCE) is our earliest source for the story in question, Menander (ca. 324 BCE) and other writers also allude to it.²⁰⁵ Aphrodite’s encounter with Phaon is also depicted on several vase paintings.²⁰⁶

Considered in isolation, it is difficult to know what to make of these allusive traditions from ancient Greece. Certainly it is far from obvious that planetary interactions hold the key to

²⁰⁰ B. Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice* (Chicago, 1991), p. 7.

²⁰¹ Sappho fragment 211 LP.

²⁰² G. Nagy, “Phaethon, Sappho’s Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973), p. 177.

²⁰³ Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae* 2.69d.

²⁰⁴ PCG IV fragment 370; Callimachus fragment 478. See also L. Köppel, “Phaon,” in H. Cancik & H. Schneider eds., *Der Neue Pauly* 9 (Stuttgart, 2000), col. 736.

²⁰⁵ Palaephatos 48. The best summary of the extant sources is that of Stein, “Phaon,” *RE* 38 (Stuttgart, 1938), cols. 1790-1796. See also T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 103-104.

²⁰⁶ *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Vol. 7 (Zürich, 1994), pp. 364-367.

Aphrodite's relations with Phaon. For additional insight into the origins of the Greek legend in question we turn to consider surprisingly similar traditions from indigenous South America.

A fascinating myth, widespread in South America, is the so-called "Star Woman" cycle (A762.2 in Thompson's Index). The basic plot finds a beautiful star visiting Earth and carrying off a mortal to make her lover or husband. In several versions of the myth, the mortal paramour is distinguished by his old age, ugliness, or some deformity. Yet as a result of his union with the Star Woman, the mortal hero is magically transformed into a handsome youth. Occasionally it is reported that the Star Woman and her lover ascend to heaven and live happily ever after. A few examples of this myth will serve to illustrate its possible relevance for understanding the Greek account of Aphrodite and Phaon.

In the first decade of the 20th century, Alberto Fric became the first white man to record a sampling of Chamacoco lore (the latter tribe hails from the Paraguayan Chaco). Included in his collection is the following narrative telling of a Star Woman's love for a homely mortal:

"Formerly the star Venus was a woman who fell in love with a homely man. Thanks to her magic, he became very handsome."²⁰⁷

Several different versions of this story were subsequently obtained from other Chamacoco informants. Although most are more elaborate and embellished than Fric's brief account, the same basic plot is usually recognizable. In their compendium of Chamacoco lore, Wilbert and Simoneau include a version narrated by Bruno Barras, the highlights of which are as follows:

"Once there was a bachelor. Every night when he lay down to sleep he wished he had a beautiful wife, a fair-skinned wife. Lying in bed at night he would see the star called Iozly [Venus]...Then the star came...She said: 'Don't be afraid. Because you have been looking at me year after year I have now come to sleep with you. I want to be your wife...'"²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Chamacoco Indians* (Los Angeles, 1987), p. 97.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

In the ensuing weeks, Star Woman continued to make secret nocturnal visits to Earth. The natives soon grew restless and more than a little jealous at the dramatic transformation in the bachelor's appearance:

“When she lay down with him there was a light emanating from her, illuminating everything...By now the other people and some girls were very envious of the young man's family because they looked so fair and beautiful. The man used to be dark and ugly, but when he slept with Iozly every night he grew better and better looking until he was fair and handsome, with smooth, fair hair.”²⁰⁹

The Star Woman cycle is widely distributed amongst the various tribes native to the Gran Chaco region, including the Apinaye, Chorote, Makka, Mocoví, and Toba. According to the anthropologist Alfred Métraux, the Star Woman myth was a traditional favorite: “This tale is very popular with Chaco Indians, and it is generally the first story they tell when asked about their folklore.”²¹⁰

A Chorote version of the myth serves to complement the Chamococo narrative. Here too a mortal man of grotesque appearance formed the object of Venus's affections:

“There was a man who was so ugly that no woman wanted him. All the women in his village persecuted him, throwing sticks at him. At night he lay down to sleep outside and started to look up at Katés: ‘What a pretty girl! How I should like to marry her!’...The following night Katés descended to the earth and had intercourse with the young man. When dawn was near she said to him: ‘I come from the sky, and at night I shall be your wife. Do not tell anybody that I have come. I do not go about during the daytime, and so that no one will see me I am going to hide inside that gourd.’”²¹¹

Another Chorote informant offered a slightly different version of the Star Woman narrative. It begins as follows:

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

²¹⁰ A. Métraux, *Myths of the Toba and Pilagá Indians of the Gran Chaco* (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 46.

²¹¹ J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Chorote Indians* (Los Angeles, 1985), pp. 265-266.

“In primordial times, a young man was outside every night, looking at beautiful stars, for the stars were women. He especially looked at Katés (Morning Star), thinking: ‘I should like her to be my wife.’”²¹²

The youth had first gained Star Woman’s attention by shooting an arrow at her. As a result of this affront she promises to visit him:

“Exactly at midnight the woman came. Now he had a wife. In the morning everyone looked at the young man whom nobody had wanted previously. No girl from his village liked him.”²¹³

In order to prevent the other tribesmen from learning of their affair, Star Woman asks her mortal lover to find a gourd so she can enter into it and remain concealed from sight. Following additional adventures, one of which found Star Woman forced to reconstitute her lover’s dismembered body, it is reported of the stellar benefactor that “she took him with her to the sky where she lives.”²¹⁴

A Toba narrative preserves the same basic story while adding a few interesting plot twists. Explicitly identified with the planet Venus, Star Woman is described as having “long hair.”²¹⁵ Once again Star Woman’s lover is described as frightfully ugly, here attributed to his scabrous body:

“A very poor man who was covered with scabs was liked by nobody because of his disease. But the morning star, a woman who lives in the sky and who uses two mortars to pound algarroba, felt sorry for him, descended to the earth, and carried him to the sky.”²¹⁶

In this Toba variant, Star Woman leads her scabrous husband to a garden whereupon she transforms him “into a handsome young man.”²¹⁷ The magical transformation of the wretched

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

²¹⁵ J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Toba Indians, Vol. 1* (Los Angeles, 1982), p. 55.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

mortal at the hands of Star Woman offers a striking thematic parallel to Phaon's dramatic rejuvenation and "beautification" by Aphrodite. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that the Star Woman is explicitly identified with the planet Venus, thereby offering compelling circumstantial evidence that Aphrodite personifies Venus in her interactions with Phaon.

The report that Star Woman "carried him [i. e., the mortal lover] to the sky" suggests that a catasterization of the mortal hero might be alluded to in these myths. Thus it is that, in the aforementioned Toba and Chorote traditions, the mortal paramour is suddenly taken up to heaven to live alongside the planet Venus. A Sherente narrative makes the catasterization explicit, remarking of the departed lover that "now he is a star beside her in the heavens."²¹⁸

As we have documented elsewhere, a number of striking parallels can be drawn between the South American Star Woman myth and ancient Sumerian traditions describing the marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi.²¹⁹ Thus, in an early hymn known as "The Ascension of Dumuzi to Heaven" the mortal hero is installed as a star alongside Inanna/Venus.²²⁰ As Pirjo Lapinkivi pointed out in her insightful analysis of this little-known text, Dumuzi's installation as a star seems to be connected to his "marriage" to the planet-goddess Inanna.²²¹ Indeed, a recurring theme in the so-called sacred marriage rite finds the Sumerian king impersonating Dumuzi and achieving divinity upon marrying the planet Venus. This is evidenced by the fact that early kings who performed the rite had the mark of divinity appended to their names and received divine honors after their death.²²² The "deification" of the Sumerian king, in our view, has its mythological prototype in Dumuzi's apotheosis or catasterization upon marrying Venus.

It is possible that a very similar catasterization originally marked the love affair between Phaethon II and Aphrodite. Thus it is that Euripides' play *Phaethon* finds the youthful daimon

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56. See also A. Métraux, *op. cit.*, p. 44 where it is reported: "Upon nearing the garden, she transformed her husband into a handsome young man."

²¹⁸ C. Nimuendajú, "Íerente Tales," *Journal of American Folklore* 57 (1944), p. 184.

²¹⁹ E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 56-72, 176-178.

²²⁰ S. Kramer, "BM 88318: The Ascension of Dumuzi to Heaven," *Recueil de travaux et communications des Études du Proche-Orient ancien* 2 (1984), pp. 5-9.

²²¹ P. Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage* (Helsinki, 2004), p. 47: "The ascension of Dumuzi to heaven and his being stationed there as a star can also be understood as a consequence of the union."

²²² E. van Buren, "The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia, Part II," *Orientalia* 13 (1944), p. 52. See also the discussion in H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 296-297.

being promised in marriage to a heavenly goddess. According to a number of prominent scholars, most notably Wilamowitz and Ferrari, the goddess in question is Aphrodite.²²³ In Ferrari's analysis the following lines of the play describe the marriage of Phaethon and Aphrodite:

"Hymen, Hymen! We sing the heavenly daughter of Zeus, the mistress of loves, Aphrodite, who brings nuptials to maidens. (230) Mistress, for you I sing this wedding song, Kypris, the most beautiful of the gods, and for your newly yoked colt, whom you hide in the sky, the offspring of the union that you inspired. The great king of this city Aphrodite weds, to be the beloved master of gold in her star-faced palace. O king greater in happiness than the blessed ones (240), you will forge a familial bond with the goddess and alone of mortals will be hymned all over boundless earth as kin of the mortals."²²⁴

Ferrari's hypothesis makes perfect sense and brings order and clarity to an otherwise obscure passage. Phaethon II, as is well known, was the beautiful child secreted away by Aphrodite. Phaethon I's description as "beloved master of gold in her star-faced palace" recalls another passage from the same play, wherein Clymene (Phaethon's mother) hides her son's body in an underground crypt (*thalamoi*) of some sort: "I shall hide him in the shiny chambers, where my husband's gold lies, but I alone seal the doors."²²⁵ As Ferrari recognized, there is a direct parallel between the two passages:

"The function of the word *thalamoi* is pivotal, since its semantic range extends from inner room to bridal chamber and, metaphorically, tomb. Here the meaning oscillates between the latter two. Like a tomb, the *thalamoi* holds the corpse of Phaethon; like those of a bridal chamber, these doors are sealed. In front of the closed doors, as one does at a wedding, the chorus sings the epithalamium. Aphrodite 'hides' (*χρύπτεις*, 234) Phaethon in the sky, while Clymene 'hides' (*χρύψω*, 231) him in the chamber. There, he oversees Merops's 'gold' (*χρυσός*, 223), while, as Aphrodite's consort, he is 'master of the gold' (*χρυσέων*, 238)."²²⁶

²²³ Other scholars have since endorsed this view. See especially C. Pacha, *A Moment's Ornament* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 110-11; and M. A. van der Sluijs, "On the Wings of Love," *JANER* 8:2 (2008).

²²⁴ G. Ferrari, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

²²⁵ Lines 221-223 as translated by G. Ferrari, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

If Ferrari's interpretation of Euripides' play is to be accepted, it follows that there is a close parallel between Phaethon II's celestial placement alongside Aphrodite/Venus and the installation of Dumuzi as a star alongside Inanna/Venus. Given the probable identity of Phaethon II with Adonis, as deduced earlier, it could be argued that Euripides has simply adapted the mythology otherwise associated with Adonis/Dumuzi and ascribed it to Phaethon as the mythical Morning Star. Yet there is no compelling evidence demanding this conclusion. Although a borrowing of traditions and imagery between ancient Mesopotamia and Greece is undeniable in some cases and can be imagined in the specific case of Phaethon, cultural borrowing is unlikely to be the ultimate origin of these curious traditions for the simple reason that we find analogous traditions in the rainforests of South America. Recall again the Sherente myth of Star Woman's mortal lover, wherein it is reported of the departed lover that "now he is a star beside her in the heavens."²²⁷ Such widespread traditions, as I have documented, describe the much-celebrated conjunction or "sacred marriage" between the mythical Morning Star (Mars) and the planet Venus.

A curious tradition preserved by Hyginus is of interest here. In an aetiological tale purporting to explain the learned name of the planet Mars—*Pyroeis*, "fiery"—the Greek mythographer reports that "Mars was in love with Venus, but as she was already married, he asked that his star might be placed next to hers, so that he might be with her in the sky, at least."²²⁸

But this is exactly the celestial station Hesiod assigns to Phaethon II—namely, next to Aphrodite/Venus in the sky!

From the tropical rainforests of South America, we turn next to consider a number of sacred traditions from the ancient Near East where we will encounter yet another "Morning Star" long thought to resemble Phaethon.

²²⁷ C. Nimuendajú, "Sherente Tales," *Journal of American Folklore* 57 (1944), p. 184.

²²⁸ Hyginus *Astronomica* 2:42 as quoted from T. Condos, *The Katasterismoi of the Pseudo-Eratosthenes* (Berkeley, 1970).

Chapter Ten

Helel ben Shahar

“Ancient traditions, even clothed as myth or legend, cannot be lightly dismissed as fantastic or even meaningless constructions. And this caution is particularly appropriate when we are dealing with serious reports, especially those of a religious nature, such as are offered in abundance in the Old Testament.”²²⁹

“The veneration of the starry heavens was so rooted among the Semites, that even in the most faithful monotheistic Jews a great temptation would always remain.”²³⁰

“In the poetic contexts of Judg 5:20 and Isa 14:12-13 we still find a conception of deified stars, very closely linked, particularly in the last case, to the originally pan-Semitic belief of a ‘mount of congregation in the side of the north’.”²³¹

“Despite intensive scholarly analysis, the mythological background of Isa 14:12b-21 remains ‘resolutely obscure’.”²³²

In a notoriously difficult passage in the Old Testament, Isaiah represents Helel ben Shahar’s attempt to scale heaven as an exemplary case of hubris. The passage in question reads as follows:

“How have you fallen from the heavens, Helel ben Shahar; You have been cut down to the ground, O weakling above the nations. It was you who said in your heart, ‘I shall ascend the heavens; above the stars of El I shall raise high my throne; and I shall sit on the Mount of Assembly on the slopes of Saphon; I shall ascend above the heights of the clouds, I shall make myself like Elyon’. But you have been brought down to Sheol, to the recess of the Pit.”²³³

²²⁹ Franz Kugler, *Sibyllinischer Sternkampf und Phaethon in naturgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Münster, 1927), p. 7.

²³⁰ J. Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin, 1897), p. 209.

²³¹ F. Lelli, “Stars,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 1535.

²³² W. Barrick, *BMH as Body Language* (New York, 2008), p. 84.

²³³ *Isaiah* 14:12-15.

In ancient translations of the Biblical texts, including the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Targum, Helel is understood as the “Morning Star” (the LXX Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible translates the name as Greek *Heôsphoros* and the Latin Vulgate version translates it as Lucifer). Scholars are agreed that the passage in question preserves very archaic language and imagery, not all of which is readily intelligible. A proper understanding of Isaiah’s account is further complicated by the fact that the poet interweaves historical events with mythological themes in order to suit his polemical purpose.²³⁴ Thus, Isaiah compares an unnamed historical king to the fallen star, whose fate was presumably familiar to his audience:

“The poet allowed the name *hyll bn šhr* [i.e., Helel ben Shahar] to be perceived as an allusion to the despot whose fall is recounted in vss. 4b-11a. The name retained its force in the minds of the poet’s audience as either a divine name or epithet for the god who was said to have behaved similarly in the divine council. As an illustrative allusion to the excesses of an unnamed despot, *hyll bn šhr* and his fall contribute to the formation of a scenario that depicts a ruler with grandiose dreams. The tyrant’s delusions are, therefore, a reflection of *hyll bn šhr* and his hunger for cosmic kingship.”²³⁵

The epithet *ben Shahar* marks the rebellious star as the son of Dawn—Hebrew *Shahar*.²³⁶ Here it will be remembered that Hesiod had described Phaethon II as the son of Dawn (*Eos*). This correspondence between the Hebrew and Greek traditions led some scholars to compare the myth of Helel ben Shahar with that of Phaethon. Michael Astour summarized the various arguments as follows:

“There is no doubt that the myth of Phaëthon is entirely adopted from W-S [West Semitic] mythology. Gruppe showed as early as 1906, and Grelot developed in detail fifty years later, the fact that the name, image, and myth of Phaëthon go back to the Canaanite myth of *Hêlêl ben Šaḥar* ‘Shining One, sun of Dawn,’ preserved as a fragment in Isaiah 14:12-15. The name

²³⁴ H. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion* (Leiden, 1996), p. 99 writes: “It must be remembered that historical and mythic references have been blended impressionistically so as to form a unified historico-mythological piece extending from vss. 4b-20a.”

²³⁵ Ibid., pp. 130-131.

²³⁶ Wilfred Watson, “Helel,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 746 translates the name as “Shining one, son of dawn.”

Phaëthôn ‘the shining, glittering’ is an exact translation of *Hêlēl*. According to Hesiod’s *Theogony* 986-991, Phaëthon was the son of Eos, the Dawn, from Cephalos, and was ravished by Aphrodite to become the night-guardian of her temple. Grelot compares this passage with another one in the *Theogony* 378-382 (which he believes to be the more authentic of the two): that Eos bore to Astraeos, Zephyros (west wind), Boreas (north wind), Notos (south wind) and the star Heosphoros, i.e., the morning star, replacing the absent Euros (east wind). From these parallel passages it follows that Phaëthon, in addition to the significance of this name, was, like Hêl’l (correctly translated *Heôsphoros* in LXX and *Lucifer* in the Vulgate) both the Morning Star and the son of Dawn.”²³⁷

As the “Shining One” of the dawn, or “Morning Star,” it is only natural that scholars would seek to interpret the traditions surrounding Helel ben Shahaḥ by reference to the behavior of the planet Venus.²³⁸ J. McKay offered the following summary of the conventional view:

“The theory most widely favoured today is that Is. xiv 12-15 is a nature myth and that Helel is ‘the shining one’, the brightest star in the morning sky, Venus as the morning star. Venus, like Mercury, lies inside the Earth’s orbit and appears in the west at evening following the Sun to rest and in the east at or before dawn rising before the Sun. Because of its orbital path it is never seen to attain the celestial zenith before it is blotted from sight by the light of the rising Sun. Instead it seems to the observer that it is unable to ascend ‘above the stars of El’ and is compelled to descend from its highest point towards the morning horizon, eventually disappearing from view, as it were ‘cut down to the ground’ and ‘brought down to Sheol, to the recesses of the Pit’ beneath the eastern horizon.

The strength of this interpretation is that it does not require textual emendation, it recognizes the normal meaning of the word [Hebrew Shahaḥ] and it brings the myth within the context of known ancient mythology. Already at the end of the last century Gunkel, whilst generally arguing for a Babylonian background, noted that ‘in a similar vein is the Greek myth of the early

²³⁷ M. Astour, *Hellenosemitica* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 268-269.

²³⁸ W. Watson, *op. cit.*, col. 746.

death of Phaethon, son of Eos; furthermore, Phaethon is the morning-star, and in meaning the word [Greek Phaethon] is identical with [Hebrew Helel] (shining)'.²³⁹

The astronomer Ed Krupp has offered a similar view. Krupp's interpretation of the Biblical passage is representative of modern scholarship in that it views Helel's fall from heaven as describing the familiar solar system in allegorical fashion:

"Isaiah was not writing an astronomical treatise, but he did exploit the behavior of the morning star symbolically for his own purpose...Isaiah's treatment of Venus tells us that the planet was consumed by its sense of its own importance. In that sense, Venus is guilty of pride. It scales the eastern wall of heaven ahead of the sun, not as a herald but as a social climber, and it lingers arrogantly in the dawn long after respectable stars have withdrawn to their chambers."²⁴⁰

While we would agree with McKay and Krupp that astronomical allegory likely informs the prophet's imagery, it is our opinion that the tradition of Helel's fall will never be explained by reference to the familiar solar system. Certainly it is telling that the conventional interpretation as espoused by McKay and Krupp offers nothing in the way of guidance with respect to how or why the planet Venus should be connected to the Mount of Assembly in the far north, much less how we are to understand El himself or his council of stars.²⁴¹ Indeed, Isaiah's reference to the Mount of Assembly receives remarkably short shrift in the hypothesis defended by McKay and Krupp—this despite the fact that the mountain in question forms a prominent motif in the myth of Helel ben Shazar as also in Ugaritic myth, whence numerous scholars would derive Isaiah's imagery (see below). The hypothesis that Helel's fall into Sheol commemorates the disappearance of the planet Venus beneath the horizon, finally, is offered with little or no discussion and is at odds with the abundant testimony from the ancient world that the Netherworld—like the Cosmic Mountain with which it is inextricably associated—is to be located in the northern circumpolar heavens.²⁴²

²³⁹ J. McKay, "Helel and the Dawn-Goddess," *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1966), pp. 453-454.

²⁴⁰ *Beyond the Blue Horizon* (New York, 1991), p. 199.

²⁴¹ It will be noted that various translations render *Isaiah* 14:13 as follows: "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north." See M. Heiser, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

²⁴² E. Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Atlanta, 1980), pp. 148-168. See also the extensive discussion in E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 121-139.

As in most matters pertaining to mythological exegesis, it is the evidence of comparative mythology that will point the way to a proper understanding of the Biblical imagery describing Helel's intimate connection with the Divine Council in the north. As Mullen, Heiser, and other scholars have documented, a precise counterpart to El's Mount of Assembly can be found in Ugaritic myth:

“At the level of myth the strongest affinity is between Isa 14 and the Athtar episode in the Ugaritic Cycle of Baal. This is strengthened by common terminology, in particular *hr mœd*, ‘mount of the assembly’ and *yrkty spwn*, ‘heights of Saphon’ (v. 13) which correspond to Ug *phr nrd*, ‘plenary session’ (*KTU* 1.2 i:14) and *mrym spn*, ‘heights of Saphon’ (*KTU* 1.3 iv:1) respectively.”²⁴³

It is possible to be more specific about the celestial locus of the Mount of Assembly: It is to be found in the far north together with “the stars of El.” Hans Wildberger has offered a wealth of evidence that El's residence in Ugaritic myth was located atop a mountain to the far north: “For the Ugaritic El, it is a residence on a distant, high mountain in the north, in which case there might be links between it and the world mountain.”²⁴⁴ The same scholar added: “This idea that El had his dwelling place in the most distant region of the north must have been known in Jerusalem as well.”²⁴⁵ Michael Heiser offered a similar interpretation:

“The ‘stars of God’ above which the villain desires to vault himself are considered by scholars seeking a link to Ugaritic literature to be those divine beings who comprised El's council. This correlation appears secure, since elsewhere (Job xxxviii 7) the Hebrew Bible employs the analogous *kôkêbê bôqer* to speak of divine beings. El's ‘assembled congregation,’ (*pΔr mœd*) of course, met on a mountain...The council met on a mountain that was the ‘sources of the two

²⁴³ W. Watson, “Helel,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 749.

²⁴⁴ H. Wildberger, *Isaiah: Isaiah 13-27* (Minneapolis, 1997), p. 66. See also H. Niehr, “Zaphon,” *DDD*, col. 1746 who writes: “In the OT, Zaphon occurs in a general sense meaning ‘north (-wind)’ and in a special sense designating a divine mountain.”

²⁴⁵ H. Wildberger, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

rivers,' in the 'midst of the fountains of the double-deep.' The location was a seat of judgment and the gate-way to the Netherworld."²⁴⁶

How, then, are we to understand the stars of El? According to William F. Albright and Frank Cross, the phrase in question—*kwkby 'l*—is an archaic vestige from Canaanite cosmology and has reference to the "circumpolar stars of the north."²⁴⁷ Hugh Page has recently endorsed this stellar identification, noting that the Morning Star's crime is that "he announces to the heavens that he will ascend to the holy mount where Elyon sits and place his throne above the circumpolar stars."²⁴⁸ This evidence, in turn, naturally begs the question: What is the Morning Star doing cavorting with the circumpolar stars? In the current solar system, needless to say, the planet Venus never moves anywhere near the circumpolar region. What is the meaning of this apparent anomaly?

There are several possible answers to this question. It is possible that the ancient scribes, not being astronomers, were being unduly cavalier in describing the Morning Star's ascent to the circumpolar region. Alternatively, it is possible that the assembly of stars is not to be identified with the current circumpolar stars. A third possibility would be to reconsider the identification of Helel himself. Perhaps Isaiah's Morning Star is not to be identified with the planet Venus. In order to determine which, if any, of these alternatives is most probable it is instructive to perform a cross-cultural analysis to determine whether any other cultures mentioned the Morning Star in conjunction with an assemblage of stars in the distant north.

A divine council of stars in the northern circumpolar regions was also recognized by the Skidi skywatchers of the New World.²⁴⁹ Witness the following tradition reported by the anthropologist Alice Fletcher:

"Right over head there is a circle of stars, this is the council."²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ M. Heiser, "The Mythological Provenance of Isa. XIV 12-15: A Reconsideration of the Ugaritic Material," *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001), p. 357.

²⁴⁷ H. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131. M. Heiser, *op. cit.*, p. 354, similarly, translates the passage as "I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north."

²⁴⁹ G. Dorsey, *Traditions of the Skidi Pawnee* (Boston, 1904), p. 340 reports that the North Star presides over the "Council of the Chiefs" in heaven.

Interestingly enough, the original governor of this council of stars was evidently the mythical Morning Star.²⁵¹ The astronomer Von Del Chamberlain called attention to the primacy of the Skidi Morning Star in this regard:

“The circle of stars over head...is known as the Council of Chiefs, Lesaru. This council is symbolic of, and is to remind the people of the original council of stars presided over by the Morning Star.”²⁵²

The Skidi tradition in question confirms that there was indeed a celestial prototype for the “council of stars” alluded to in Isaiah’s account of Helel’s ascent to heaven as also in Ugaritic myth—namely, a circle of stars in the northern circumpolar skies. Thus we have good reason to accept the fundamental veracity of the ancient Near Eastern reports that the Morning Star once ascended to the northern circumpolar heavens and appeared in conjunction with an assemblage of stars. The fact that the Skidi Morning Star was explicitly identified with the planet Mars (see chapter three), however, suggests that all is not well with the conventional identification of Helel ben Shahar as Venus.

To return to the Greek myth of Phaethon: In his learned discussion of the possibility of some sort of interplay between the Biblical myth of Helel ben Shahar, Ugaritic Athtar, and the tragic charioteer of Greek lore, Hans Wildberger offered the following critique:

“One ought not to conceal the difficulties presented by this thesis...We do not learn anything about Phaethon’s desire to establish his throne higher than the stars of God nor that he wanted to establish himself atop God’s mountain of assembly; and we also learn nothing about his being cast down into the kingdom of the dead. That which the Ugaritic texts tell us about the story of Attar does not match up (contra McKay) with the myth of Phaethon.”²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Quoted in V. del Chamberlain, *When Stars Came Down to Earth* (Los Altos, 1982), p. 137.

²⁵¹ J. Murie, *op. cit.*, p. 40 writes: “We are told that Morning Star presided over the first council of the gods.” See also J. Monroe & R. Williamson, *They Dance in the Sky* (Boston, 1987), p. 47.

²⁵² George Dorsey as quoted by V. Del Chamberlain, “The Chief and His Council,” in R. Williamson & C. Farrer eds., *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 228. It will be noted that Dorsey, like Del Chamberlain, identified this circle of stars with Corona Borealis.

²⁵³ H. Wildberger, *Isaiah: Isaiah 13-27* (Minneapolis, 1997), p. 64.

Wildberger's critique is valid so far as it goes. That said, there is some reason for believing that the original myth of Phaethon included analogous themes and that they have simply not survived fully intact. It is also likely that certain motifs such as Phaethon's being placed in the underworld can actually be detected in the extant sources but have generally been overlooked by previous scholars (see chapter twelve). As a case in point, consider one of the few fragments that have survived from Aeschylus's fragmentary tragedy on Phaethon:

"We know almost nothing of the plot of this play...The meager fragments contribute scarcely anything to the reconstruction of the plot. I cite them with brief comments. A. (fr 68N, 102 M...) 'Ρῖται μὲν δὴ πατρός 'Η<ε>λίον...The allusion is to the fabled Rhipaeian mountains of the north, beyond which the Hyperboreans live. They are probably called Helios' mountains because the sun is imagined to sink behind them. Cf. Alcman *fr.* 90P 'Ρίτας, ὅρος ἀνθέων υλαί, νυκτὸς μελαίνας στέρνον."²⁵⁴

Diggle's ad hoc suggestion that Helios's mountain-kingdom to the north reflects a naïve belief that this is where the sun was imagined to descend is patently absurd. Helios's mountain is located in the distant north for the very same reason that the mountain of the Ugaritic El was found in the distant north—namely, because that's where the World Mountain of ancient myth *was* located during that prehistoric period prior to the extraordinary cosmic catastrophe that rearranged the ancient skies. The mere fact that a central theme of the Phaethon myth involved the youthful hero's ascent to the celestial kingdom of Helios suggests that a journey to the northern circumpolar heavens properly belonged to his myth as well, hitherto unrecognized as such.

²⁵⁴ J. Diggle, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

Chapter Eleven

Athtar

“Western Semitic religion in general owes much to astral religion, and yet most modern accounts take little note of it.”²⁵⁵

“Normally in such circumstances, one looks for shared traits in the various sources—‘correspondences’—on the strength of which a prototype may be posited. That prototype is then taken to be both logically and historically anterior to the attested data, among which some exemplars or ‘reflexes’ are seen to derive more faithfully and others with greater transformations of the prototypical pattern.”²⁵⁶

In 1946, the renowned scholar William F. Albright suggested that the Biblical account of Helel ben Shahar traced back to the Canaanite myth of Athtar, the latter only recently brought to light in the wake of the revolutionary finds at Ugarit.²⁵⁷ A decade later Pierre Grelot proposed that there was an historical connection between the myths involving Helel, Athtar, and the Greek hero Phaethon.²⁵⁸

Albright’s hypothesis has found numerous converts in the meantime. Ulf Oldenburg states simply that Helel ben Shahar “is *œ*Attar.”²⁵⁹ Michael Heiser, in a recent summary of the available evidence, concludes that “the Athtar myth [is] the mythological well from which Isa. xiv 12-15 is drawn.”²⁶⁰

The basis of the comparison is at least twofold: (1) Athtar, like Helel, was identified with the “Morning Star;” (2) Athtar, like Helel, is said to have once ascended a Mount of Assembly in the north (ʿāpon). Thus, an Ugaritic text (UT 129) belonging to the Baal cycle reports that Athtar

²⁵⁵ M. Smith, “Astral Religion and the Representation of Divinity,” in S. Noegel et al eds., *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (University Park, 2003), p. 187.

²⁵⁶ B. Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice* (Chicago, 1991), p. 120.

²⁵⁷ W. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (New York, 1968), p. 187.

²⁵⁸ P. Grelot, “Isaïe XIV 12-15 et son arrière-plan mythologique,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 149 (1956), pp. 18-48. See also the discussion in J. McKay, “Helel and the Dawn-Goddess,” *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1966), p. 455.

²⁵⁹ U. Oldenburg, “Above the Stars of El,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1970), p. 206.

²⁶⁰ M. Heiser, “The Mythological Provenance of Isa. XIV 12-15: A Reconsideration of the Ugaritic Material,” *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001), p. 362.

ascended to the throne of El/Baal atop the World Mountain. The passage in question reads as follows:

“Athtar the terrible was made king. Then Athtar the terrible went up to the far reaches of ʿapon. He sat in Aliyan Baal’s throne. His feet would not reach the stool. His head would not reach its top.”²⁶¹

It was Oldenburg’s thesis that, in a Northwest Semitic myth now lost, Athtar’s usurpation of the throne came at the expense of El and that he was eventually hurled from heaven for his insolence. Although there is reason to suspect that much of Athtar’s mythology has indeed been lost to history or remains to be discovered, there is no evidence in the extant texts that the god usurped El’s throne; rather, he seems to have been willingly offered the job. Nor, for that matter, is there any indication that Athtar was forcibly removed from the throne or hurled from heaven. Instead he seems to have voluntarily relinquished the throne and assumed residence in the Underworld, wherein he forthwith served as king:

“And Athtar the terrible answered: ‘I will not rule from atop ʿapon.’ Athtar the terrible came down, from the throne of Aliyan Baal he descended. And he ruled over the Underworld, god of all of it.”²⁶²

If Albright and Heiser are right that the myth of Helel reflects the influence of the Ugaritic cycle of Athtar, it follows that a proper understanding of the latter god is pivotal to unmasking the original identity of Isaiah’s stellar hero. What, then, do we know about Athtar?

For the Arabic cultures of the Near East astronomy has a long and distinguished history. During the first millennium CE, the Arabs were practicing a relatively advanced method of astronomy at a time when Europe was enduring a veritable Dark Age. It was Arabian astronomers who preserved many of the standard astronomical and philosophical treatises of the ancient Greeks

²⁶¹ Lines 55-61a as translated by H. Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

²⁶² 61b-67 as translated in *Ibid.*, p. 91-92.

for posterity—not to mention a fair share of Sumerian lore about the various celestial bodies.²⁶³ Thus, a study of stellar nomenclature as preserved in Arabic catalogues from the first millennium CE reveals a remarkable continuity with Sumerian star astronomical concepts.²⁶⁴

It is commonly acknowledged that the Morning Star had a long history of worship in the Arabic world. Among the South Arabs the “Morning Star” was known as Athtar (ʿAṭṭar), the latter conceptualized as a youthful war-god and agent of fertility.²⁶⁵ Ulf Oldenburg summarized the god’s cult as follows:

“It is not strange that the brilliant Morning Star...fascinated the desert dwellers...In their imagination this planet became the Valiant war god, the Strong One, and by giving victory he became Peace-maker. Also his symbol the spearhead reveals him as the terrifying war god...Although there is evidence of the hermaphroditism of ʿAṭṭar also in South Arabia, his masculine character as the Morning-star was all prevailing in the desert...As the giver of water he was called ‘he who pours out’ and ‘the lord of the water cistern’ and was termed an irrigation deity...Both because of his importance as a war god and his function as a fertility god he was the most important god of the South Arabian pantheon, always heading the lists of official deities.”²⁶⁶

Athtar was elsewhere singled out for his striking beauty. In the notorious human sacrifices offered to this god by the Bedouins of the Sinai peninsula, the preferred victim was “a particularly young and beautiful boy.”²⁶⁷ The beautiful boy was expressly likened to the star-god as witnessed by the following ritual declaration: “We bring you [Athtar] a sacrifice which is similar to you.”²⁶⁸ Athtar’s beauty, in turn, recalls that ascribed to Aphrodite’s paramour, Phaethon II.

²⁶³ P. Kunitzsch, *Arabische Sternnamen in Europa* (Wiesbaden, 1959), pp. 16-22.

²⁶⁴ R. Miller, “Pleiades Perceived,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108 (1988), p. 7 notes that Arabic star names “still show not only their Babylonian but also their Sumerian origins and identity, lexically as well as astronomically.”

²⁶⁵ For a summary of the god’s cult, see M. Höfner, “Die vorislamischen Religionen Arabiens,” in H. Gese, M. Höfner & K. Rudolph eds., *Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer* (Stuttgart, 1970), pp. 268-317.

²⁶⁶ U. Oldenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

²⁶⁷ J. Henninger, “Zum Problem der Venussterngottheit bei den Semiten,” *Anthropos* 71 (1976), p. 145, citing Nilus.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Athtar is also attested in early texts from Ugarit (ca. 1500 BCE), wherein he is represented as a powerful warrior, his epithet *ærz* signifying “the terrible” or luminous one.²⁶⁹ Texts from Farah and Ebla also mention the god.²⁷⁰ Athtar’s astral nature is evident already in texts from Emar (ca. 2000 BCE), one text referring to him as Athtar “of the stars.”²⁷¹ Mark Smith summarizes the god’s early cult as follows:

“In sum, the Ugaritic texts as well as the most proximate comparative evidence from Emar would suggest that Athtar is an astral deity who is considered a major warrior deity.”²⁷²

As we have argued elsewhere, the available evidence suggests that Athtar is to be identified with the planet Mars rather than Venus.²⁷³ The testimony of the Mesha stele is especially telling in this regard: Around 830 BCE, the Moabite king Mesha erected a now famous stele in which he credited his national god Chemosh with facilitating the rout of the Israelites under the house of Omri. On the monument in question the Moabite god’s name is compounded with that of Athtar.²⁷⁴ As scholars have noted, this curious bit of nomenclature would appear to point to an identification or assimilation of the two gods.²⁷⁵ Yet in Middle Assyrian god lists Chemosh is numbered among the epithets of Nergal, the Babylonian god assigned to the planet Mars.²⁷⁶ If Athtar and Chemosh were identified in ancient times, as appears to be the case, Athtar’s affinity with Nergal/Mars would seem to follow.

²⁶⁹ M. Smith, “The God Athtar in the Ancient Near East and His Place in KTU 1.6 I,” in J. Greenfield et al eds., *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots* (1995), p. 630. On the latter translation, see W. Watson, *op. cit.*, col. 749.

²⁷⁰ M. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 628-629.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 629.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 640.

²⁷³ E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. x-y.

²⁷⁴ J. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton, 1958), pp. 209-210. See also the discussion in J. Henninger, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

²⁷⁵ H.P. Muller, “Chemosh,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 359 writes: “The binomial signification identifies Chemosh with the male god Athtar.” See also J. Gray, “The Desert God *æAtr* in the Literature and Religion of Canaan,” *JNES* 8 (1949), p. 78: “Kemosh is the most familiar form of the divine name, but it may be that this is only an epithet of *æAt@ar* or perhaps a hypostasis of that god.”

²⁷⁶ J. Curtis, “An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957), pp. 146-150. See also W. Lambert, “Kammuß,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie, Vol 5* (Berlin, 1976-1980), p. 335, citing CT 24, 36, 66.

Other evidence points to the same conclusion. It has long been known that Greek emigrants to the capital of Moab (Diban/Areopolis) identified the native Chemosh with their war-god Ares who, like Nergal, was identified with the red planet.²⁷⁷ If the ancient Moabites themselves recognized a close affinity between Athtar and Chemosh, it follows from the latter's identification with Nergal *and* Ares that Athtar himself is best understood as the planet Mars rather than Venus.

In perfect keeping with this line of reasoning is the fact that Athtar's status as the ruler of the Netherworld ('ar≈) mirrors Nergal's epithet *umun-úrugal*, "Lord of the Netherworld."²⁷⁸ So far as I know, the planet Venus is *never* described as the lord of the Netherworld in any ancient culture. Such traditions describe the planet Mars, not Venus.

It is also significant that Athtar's epithet describing him as the "Strong One" finds a precise parallel in the cult of Nergal, who was equally renowned for his prodigious strength.²⁷⁹ Thus an early Akkadian hymn invokes the planet-god as the "Strong One":

"May Nergal, the strong one among the gods, the fighter without peer, who achieves victory for me, burn his [i.e., the enemy's] people in his great power, like the raging fire of swamp-reeds!"²⁸⁰

That the epithet in question has specific reference *to the planet Mars* is supported by a wealth of evidence, not the least of which is the fact that Mars-gods are everywhere described as the "Strong One" or as the "strongest of the gods." Indeed, the red planet itself was conceptualized as "strong": The *Liber Legum Regionum* of Bardesanes (circa 154-222 CE) describes the planet Mars with the epithet 'rs æzyz'—"strong"—the latter being the very word from which Athtar receives his epithet æzz, "the strong one."²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ H. Müller, "Chemosh," in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), col. 360.

²⁷⁸ D. Katz, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources* (Bethesda, 2003), p. 404.

²⁷⁹ E. von Weiher, *Der babylonische Gott Nergal* (Berlin, 1971), p. 72.

²⁸⁰ W. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Reṣep* (New Haven, 1976), p. 37.

²⁸¹ H. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980), p. 163.

In support of our thesis that the mythical “Morning Star” is to be identified with the planet Mars, it is telling to find the latter star likewise singled out for its extraordinary strength. Thus, the Skidi Pawnee describe Mars as follows:

“But the star’s strength is awesome. It has caused other worlds to crumble before ours was created, and when the time comes for ours to end it will be because of Morning Star.”²⁸²

It is well documented that, as the Skidi prepared for war, they prayed to the Morning Star for strength and courage. Ritual chants celebrate the Star’s prodigious strength and virility:

“As we sing, the Morning Star comes still nearer and now we see him standing there in the heavens, a strong man shining brighter and brighter...As he stands there so bright, he is bringing us strength and new life.”²⁸³

Other Amerindian tribes preserved analogous traditions. The sacred lore of the Cakchiquel of Guatemala is particularly instructive in this regard. Amongst the Cakchiquel the Morning Star was known as Santiago, the latter being conceptualized as “the strongest star.”²⁸⁴

The surpassing strength ascribed to the mythical Morning Star/Mars is merely one of countless archetypal motifs that will forever remain inexplicable so long as scholars look to the present solar system as a guide for understanding ancient mythological conceptions. For why would one particular planet, rather than another, be consistently described as the “strongest star”? These peculiar traditions surrounding the mythical Morning Star, in turn, may well have informed Hesiod’s choice of epithet in describing Aphrodite’s youthful paramour:

“And to Cephalus she [Eos] bare a splendid son, strong Phaethon, a man like the gods, whom, when he was a young boy in the tender flower of glorious youth with childish thoughts, laughter-loving Aphrodite seized and caught up and made a keeper of her shrine by night, a divine spirit.”²⁸⁵

²⁸² H. Hirschall, *The Song of Creation* (Vancouver, 1979), myth 14 (no page numbers).

²⁸³ H. Alexander, “North American,” in L. Gray ed., *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston, 1917), pp. 94-95.

²⁸⁴ I. Sprajc, “The Venus-Rain-Maize Complex in the Mesoamerican World View: Part 1,” *JHA* 24 (1993), p. 22.

John of Damascus, commenting on the pre-Islamic religion of the Arabs, wrote that until the time of Heraclius (610-641 CE) they “served idols openly” and “worshipped the morning star and Aphrodite.”²⁸⁶ By Aphrodite, John doubtless had in mind the planet-goddess al-ʿUzza—i. e., Venus.²⁸⁷ Less obvious is what the Syrian monk meant by the phrase “Morning Star.” Indeed, this report has long puzzled scholars since it is commonly assumed that Aphrodite, as the planet Venus, *was the Morning Star*. Joseph Henninger, among others, was perplexed by John’s testimony:

“One wonders at the mention of ‘the morning star and Aphrodite’. The morning star was Venus-Aphrodite.”²⁸⁸

Why, then, would John of Damascus see fit to distinguish between the two astral deities? Is it possible that this astute observer of Arabic religion knew something that has hitherto escaped the attention of modern scholars?

Azizos

The Syrian city of Palmyra was renowned in antiquity as a heavily trafficked caravan port and thus it is hardly surprising that it came to function as a melting pot of foreign religious cults. A popular war-god there appears under the name Azizos, attested in numerous inscriptions from Roman times.²⁸⁹ Syrian soldiers carried the god’s cult as far as Apulum in Dacia, where one inscription identifies Azizos with the “Morning Star” (*Phosphorus*).²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ *Theogony* 986-991 as translated by H. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Homeric* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 153.

²⁸⁶ J. Henninger, “Über Sternkunde und Sternkult in Nord-und Zentralarabien,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 79 (1954), p. 105, citing John Merrill, “Of the Tractate of John of Damascus on Islam,” *MW* 41 (1951), pp. 88-97.

²⁸⁷ E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), p. 8.

²⁸⁸ J. Henninger, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

²⁸⁹ H. Drijvers, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

²⁹⁰ M. Rostovtzeff, “The Caravan-Gods of Palmyra,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 22 (1932), p. 110.

As it turns out, the name of the Syrian war god is identical with the aforementioned epithet of Athtar's—*æzz*, “the strong or mighty”—attested in Sabaeen inscriptions from the first centuries BCE and CE.²⁹¹ In light of this fact scholars have long sought to compare the two gods, viewing the Palmyran Azizos as an avatar or offshoot of the South Arabian Athtar. The fact that both gods were identified with the “Morning Star” and conceived as mighty warriors is certainly consistent with this interpretation.

The ancients themselves identified Azizos with Ares, the Greek god identified with the planet Mars. For this datum we have the express testimony of the apostate Emperor Julian who, in a speech at Antioch in 362 CE, extolled the virtues of Helios against the god of the upstart Christian religion:

“The inhabitants of Edessa, a place from time immemorial sacred to Helios, associate with him Monimos and Azizos. Iamblichus, from whom I have taken this and all besides, a little from a great store, says that the secret meaning to be interpreted is that Monimos is Hermes and Azizos is Ares, the assessors of Helios...”²⁹²

That the Syrian Iamblichus (ca. 250-325 CE) was well-versed in the religious thought of his time and cultural milieu is commonly acknowledged by modern scholars.²⁹³ Why, then, would he (and Julian) identify a “Mars-god” with the Palmyran “Morning Star”?

Modern commentators, it must be said, have completely misrepresented the extant record in their attempt to force-fit Julian's testimony to the familiar appearance of the present solar system. Witness the following statement of Javier Teixidor, a leading authority on the Palmyran pantheon:

“When the Emperor Julian delivered his oration on Helios at Antioch (*Orationes* 4.150CD) he remarked that the Edessenes worshiped the Sun flanked by Azizos and Monimos, two deities to

²⁹¹ W. Heimpel, “A Catalog of Near Eastern Venus Deities,” *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 4:3 (1982), p. 19.

²⁹² Julian 150-C-D as quoted in H. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980), p. 147.

²⁹³ H. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980), p. 152.

be identified with Ares and Hermes, according to Iamblichos. Thus Monimos is the planet Mercury, whereas Azizos is Venus.”²⁹⁴

Talk about alternative facts! Does Teixidor not know that Ares is the god of the planet Mars, not Venus? Amazingly, such confusion is not confined to Teixidor. H. J. Drijvers has offered the most comprehensive discussion of Edessan religion to date.²⁹⁵ After a detailed discussion of the relevant evidence pertaining to the cult of Azizos, Drijvers offered the following summary:

“The most appropriate explanation of Iamblichos’ identification of Azizos and Monimos with Ares and Hermes, respectively, therefore seems to be that just as Azizos and Monimos themselves are two aspects of the Venus star, representing the Morning and Evening star and at the same time Venus’ militant and protecting qualities, so Ares and Hermes stand for the same two aspects of Venus.”²⁹⁶

Classicists will doubtless be surprised to see Ares identified as a Venus-god, a conclusion that is as illogical as it is unsupported by any credible evidence.

How, then, would we understand the import of Julian’s testimony? From the standpoint of comparative religion it is patently obvious that Azizos’s identification with Ares dovetails perfectly with Athtar’s identification with Chemosh—the latter god, in turn, being explicitly identified with Ares (and Nergal). Such evidence strongly favors a Martian identity for the Arabic “Morning Star.”

Julian’s homage to the ancient sun-god likely contains other vestiges of archaic celestial lore. Thus, in the learned Emperor’s commentary with regard to Azizos’s role in religious cult there appears the following statement: “Now I am aware that Ares, who is called Azizos by the Syrians who inhabit Edessa, goes before Helios in the procession...”²⁹⁷ Julian is here likely referring to some arcane feature of Edessan ritual wherein a representation of Azizos was

²⁹⁴ J. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden, 1979), p. 68.

²⁹⁵ H. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980).

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

paraded before a representation of Helios. But perhaps there is more that can be said on this matter. What does it mean that Ares/Azizos, as the Morning Star, goes *before* the Sun?

It is relevant to note here that a traditional epithet of the mythical “Morning Star” identifies it as the one who goes before the sun. Such was the case amongst the Zuñi Indians of the New World, for example: “In certain Zuñi narratives the Morning Star is referred to as ‘the one that goes before the sun’.”²⁹⁸ The same epithet is associated with various Morning Star figures throughout Mesoamerica, as Walter Lehmann has documented.²⁹⁹

Teixidor’s commentary on this passage from Julian is instructive in that it aptly illustrates the confusion surrounding Azizos’s cult:

“The name Azizos, which derives from the root *æzz* and means ‘the strong one,’ was most probably a male personification of Venus, which as a morning star seems to have acquired a warrior character among the Bedouin. This martial character of Venus must account for the identification of Azizos with Ares (Mars). But neither the Edessenes nor Iamblichus could possibly have thought of Mars as an acolyte of the Sun because the planet does not accompany the sun.”³⁰⁰

Contrary to Teixidor’s assertion, ancient skywatchers from Syria did, in fact, conceptualize the planet Mars as an acolyte of the Sun. This idea is most apparent in an Ugaritic text known as UT 143 from the middle of the second millennium BCE wherein the Canaanite war god Reseph is described as the “gatekeeper” (*tgr*) of the Sun-goddess *ġapaß*.³⁰¹ The passage in question has been variously translated; Dahood renders it as follows: “The goddess *ġapß* sets, her porter being

²⁹⁸ M. J. Young, “Morning Star, Evening Star: Zuñi Traditional Stories,” in R. Williamson & C. Farrer eds., *Earth and Sky* (Albuquerque, 1992), p. 75.

²⁹⁹ W. Lehmann, “Ergebnisse einer mit Unterstützung der Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft in den Jahren 1925/1926 ausgeführten Forschungsreise nach Mexiko und Guatemala,” *Anthropos* 23 (1928), pp. 780-781.

³⁰⁰ J. Teixidor, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

³⁰¹ J. Sawyer & F. Stephenson, “Literary and Astronomical Evidence for a Total Eclipse of the Sun Observed in Ancient Ugarit on 3 May 1375 B. C.,” *BSOAS* 33 (1970), p. 471. See also the discussion in T. de Jong & W. van Soldt, “Redating an Early Solar Eclipse Record (KTU 1.78)...,” *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 30 (1987-88), pp. 65-77.

Rešep.”³⁰² J. R. Sawyer and F. R. Stephenson understood Reseph here as a reference to the planet Mars, and with good reason—Ugaritic texts elsewhere identify Reseph with the Sumerian Nergal/Mars.³⁰³ As the “gatekeeper” of the Sun, it naturally follows that Mars was viewed as an “acolyte” however this particular epithet is to be understood in astronomical terms.

Reseph, like Nergal himself, was represented as a pestilence-bringing warrior who doubled as an agent of fertility.³⁰⁴ The fact that his cult was formerly widely distributed throughout the ancient Near East makes Reseph a key figure in any systematic analysis of ancient myth and religion. In addition to his explicit identification with the Sumerian Nergal and the planet Mars, Reseph shares a fundamental affinity with several other gods mentioned in this study. Scholars have long compared Reseph with Chemosh, for example.³⁰⁵ Equally telling is the fact that ancient texts identify the same god with Melqart³⁰⁶ and Adonis.³⁰⁷ A Phoenician inscription from Kition, moreover, evidently refers to Reseph as *b'l* ‘z, “The Lord of the power,” thereby reminding us of Azizos.³⁰⁸

Most significant for our discussion of Azizos’s cult, however, is Reseph’s identification with the Greek god Apollo, attested in Cyprian inscriptions from the fourth century BCE.³⁰⁹ In the aforementioned texts from Apulum identifying Azizos with the “Morning Star” the same god is also identified with Apollo.³¹⁰ This identification makes perfect sense if Azizos is to be identified with the planet Mars—Apollo, like Reseph, being identifiable with the red planet.³¹¹ Yet the equation with Apollo makes no sense at all from the conventional viewpoint, wherein Azizos is to be understood as Venus, since there is no evidence whatsoever that the Greek god

³⁰² M. Dahood, “Ancient Semitic Deities in Syria and Palestine,” in S. Moscati ed., *Le Antiche Divinità Semitiche* (Rome, 1958), p. 86.

³⁰³ Ug. V.18.26. The same identification is found already at Ebla in circa 2300 BCE. See G. Pettinato, “The Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla,” *Biblical Archaeologist* (1976), p. 49.

³⁰⁴ H. Gese, *op. cit.*, p. 141. See also P. Xella, “Resheph,” in K. van der Toorn et al eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1995), cols. 1324-1330.

³⁰⁵ Of Chemosh, H. Gese, *op. cit.*, p. 141, writes: “Die kriegerische, feurige Natur zeigt den Gott als Verwandten des wesentlich besser bekannten syrischen Gottes Rešep.”

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195. See also W. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Rešep* (New Haven, 1976), p. 48.

³⁰⁷ H. Gese, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³⁰⁸ P. Xella, *op. cit.*, col. 1327.

³⁰⁹ M. Schretter, *Alter Orient und Hellas* (Innsbruck, 1974), pp. 151-173.

³¹⁰ H. Drijvers, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

³¹¹ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *Martian Metamorphoses* (Ames, 1997), pp. 51-65.

had any relation to the latter planet. Alas, such facts will not prevent scholars from pretending that such a relationship exists:

“The epithets given to Azizos clearly characterize him as the youthful Morning Star Phosphoros, who represents the protecting warrior qualities of Venus which naturally are of special interest in a military atmosphere. Hence Azizos/Mars is called *amicus*, friend of the soldiers...It seems that *bonus puer* [Azizos] also had a predictive function, otherwise his equation with the oracle god Apollo Pythios is a bit strange—unless we take into consideration that the Morning Star as such predicts that the Sun soon will rise, which function was a sufficient ground for the equation.”³¹²

As Drijvers notes, Latin emigrants to Edessa identified the native Azizos with their beloved war-god Mars. This identification makes perfect sense if Azizos personified the planet Mars. It makes no sense at all if the youthful war-god represented Venus.

In short, everything we know about the Arabic gods Athtar and Azizos is consistent with ancient conceptions surrounding the planet Mars and justifies our conclusion that the two youthful warriors are to be identified with that planet. The fact that Athtar was expressly identified with the “Morning Star” and conceptualized as the masculine power *par excellence* accords precisely with New World (Skidi) beliefs surrounding the red planet, wherein Mars was represented as the prototypical masculine force in a ritual *hieros gamos* involving Venus. The statement of John of Damascus to the effect that the ancient Arabs worshipped “the morning star *and* Aphrodite”—far from being inexplicable—rightly distinguishes Athtar from the planet Venus and thus offers a close parallel to the Skidi worship of the war-god “Morning Star”/Mars alongside the prototypical female Venus.

³¹² H. Drijvers, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

Chapter Twelve

The Egyptian Morning Star

“The earliest home of the gods that we can discern is the sky.”³¹³

The great gods confront us already at the dawn of history. The star-god Horus is a case in point, his primacy in ancient Egyptian religion being everywhere apparent. The pharaoh himself was considered to be the earthly incarnation of the stellar god, a belief-system reflected in the so-called Horus names borne by rulers from the first dynasty on.³¹⁴

While it is commonly acknowledged that Horus represents the quintessential Egyptian god, there is no consensus as to his origins or fundamental nature. That he was a celestial power all authorities concur. The question, however, is which star best explains Horus’s multifarious functions in Egyptian religion?

In order to bring clarity to the difficult question of Horus’s celestial identification, it is necessary to begin at the very beginning of Egyptian civilization. In the Early Dynastic Period (ca. 3000-2600 BCE), Horus is already identified as a particularly prominent star. An annal from the First Dynasty reign of King Aha bears the name “Festival of the Horus-Star-of-the-Gods.”³¹⁵ Early royal domain names likewise contain reference to the Horus-star. The domain established by Anedjib (also First Dynasty) was called *Ór-sbâ-@*, “Horus, star of the corporation (of gods).”³¹⁶ Hetepsekhemwy (Second Dynasty) established a domain called *Ór-Δæ-sbâ*, “Horus risen as a star.”³¹⁷ Khasekhemwy founded a new domain called *Ór-sbâ-bâw*, “Horus, the star of souls.”³¹⁸

³¹³ E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 1982), p. 227.

³¹⁴ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), p. 39.

³¹⁵ E. Hornung, *Idea Into Image* (Princeton, 1992), p. 158.

³¹⁶ T. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London, 2001), p. 121.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

Most informative, perhaps, is the domain established by Djoser at the beginning of the Third Dynasty, named *Ór-sbꜣ-Anti-pt*, “Horus-star at the front of the sky.”³¹⁹

To judge by the evidence of these names, Horus was originally conceived as a stellar power—indeed, as a most prominent star “at the front of the sky.” That said, the names in question are not sufficiently informative to securely identify which particular celestial body represented Horus during this period.

In addition to the god’s stellar roots, there is clear evidence that Horus was conceptualized as an all-powerful warrior very early on. This idea is evident already in the Pyramid Texts as the following spell from Queen Neith’s pyramid testifies:

“So, ascend to the sky amongst the stars in the sky, and those before you shall hide and those after you shall be afraid of you, because of this your identity of Horus of the Duat...of the one who strikes them, of the one who spews them out, and wipes them out, and you will strike them, spew them out, and wipe them out at the lake, at the Great Green. You shall come to stand at the fore of the Imperishable Stars and sit on your metal throne from which the dead are far away.”³²⁰

The names of early pharaohs also bear witness to Horus’s warrior prowess. Toby Wilkinson offered the following observation:

“The Horus names of several First Dynasty kings expressed the aggressive authority of Horus, perhaps reflecting the coercive power of kingship at this stage of Egyptian statehood. Names like ‘Horus the fighter’ (Aha), ‘Horus the strong’ (Djer) or ‘arm-raising Horus’ (Qaa) call to mind the warlike iconography of the earliest royal monuments from the period of state formation.”³²¹

³¹⁹ It will be noted here that Toby Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 122, translates this name as “foremost star of the sky.”

³²⁰ Utterance 666 as translated in J. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, 2005), p. 323.

³²¹ T. Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

This evidence, taken in conjunction with the Early Dynastic domain-names, strongly suggests that the stellar Horus was conceptualized as a formidable warrior. As we will document, this portrait of the god constitutes a decisive clue as to his stellar identity.

Additional information regarding the star-god Horus is to be found in the Pyramid Texts dating from roughly a half millennium later (ca. 2300 BCE). That Horus was not the familiar sun, as often maintained, is suggested by various hymns wherein the god is identified with the Morning Star. In the following passage, for example, Horus (as the deceased king) is implored to ascend to heaven and join Re:

“R’œ summons you into the zenith (?) of the sky as the Jackal, the Governor of the Two Enneads, and as Horus *Ōnty-mnit.f*; may he set you as the Morning Star in the midst of the Field of Rushes.”³²²

Here, as elsewhere in the Pyramid Texts, Horus is explicitly identified with the “Morning Star.” In this guise Horus is described as the “son” of the sun god and thus he would appear to represent a distinct celestial body altogether—presumably a particularly prominent planet or star.

The Egyptian texts describing the Horus-star provide a wealth of detail with regards to its movements in the sky, various interactions with other celestial bodies, and associated mythology. Indeed, given the great antiquity of the Pyramid Texts—they date to the third millennium BCE—they constitute the single-most important database with respect to ancient conceptions regarding the history and appearance of the mythical Morning Star. This being the case, it is instructive to learn to what extent the ancient Egyptian texts describe the Horus-star in terms otherwise reminiscent of the Greek Phaethon, Hebrew Helel, and Ugaritic Athtar.

The Birth of Horus

³²² PT 1719d as translated by R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969). All passages from the Pyramid Texts are from Faulkner’s translation unless otherwise indicated.

No complete myths involving Horus have survived from ancient Egypt. Rather, what we find are scattered allusions to miscellaneous mythological incidents such as the dramatic circumstances surrounding his birth, spectacular ascent to heaven, apocalyptic combat with Seth, or accession to the celestial throne.

Especially relevant here is the archaic Egyptian tradition reporting that Isis hid Horus in the papyrus thickets of Chemmis in order to protect the infant god from the evil designs of Set. Although this mythologem is alluded to already in the Pyramid Texts (1214), it is told most fully in magical medical texts dating from the New Kingdom:

“I am Isis, who was pregnant with her nestling, who carried the divine Horus. I bore Horus, the son of Osiris in the falcon’s nest in Khemmis...I hid him, I sheltered him out of fear of that one (i.e., Seth).”³²³

The manifold mythology surrounding Horus is recorded in its fullest form on the temple walls at Edfu. In one text preserved there the falcon-god is described as “this babe whom Isis hid in the reed-thickets of Chemmis.”³²⁴

In these texts, as elsewhere in Egyptian literature, Horus is described as being sublimely beautiful in appearance. Thus one text describes him as follows: “And the Beautiful-one arrived, Horus-of-praisegiving.”³²⁵ A hymn from the middle of the second millennium BCE describes the youthful star-god as follows:

“Isis, the powerful...who nursed the child in solitude, one knew not where...He [Horus] came out garlanded at the command of Geb and assumed rule over the Two Banks, the White Crown firm on his head; he took possession of the entire land, sky and earth were under his supervision... The whole world rejoices, their hearts are glad, their breasts are in rapture, their faces rejoice, as each one worships his (i.e., Horus’) beauty.”³²⁶

³²³ Quoted from J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 2001), p. 132.

³²⁴ A. Blackman & H. Fairman, “The Myth of Horus at Edfu—II,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 30 (1944), p. 21.

³²⁵ R. Finnestad, *Image of the World and Symbol of the Creator* (Wiesbaden, 1985), p. 32.

³²⁶ J. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 2001), pp. 145-146.

The fact that Greek visitors to ancient Egypt identified their beloved Aphrodite with Isis is well attested. It stands to reason, therefore, that the Egyptian myth of Isis's "hiding" of the beautiful Horus-star in Chemmis might well form a thematic parallel to the Greek myth preserved by Hesiod, wherein Aphrodite hid away the beautiful Phaethon.

The earliest and most complete account describing Horus's infancy and accession to universal kingship is that found in Spell 148 from the Coffin Texts. A central theme throughout the Spell in question is a dispute among the gods as to whether or not Horus is the rightful heir to the throne. Isis naturally defends her son's rightful primogeniture: "I am Isis, one more spirit-like and august than the gods; the god [Horus] is within this womb of mine and he is the seed of Osiris."³²⁷

Shortly after being born, Horus proclaims his power over the other gods. There he offers the following pronouncement:

"My flight aloft has reached the horizon, I have overpassed the gods of the sky. I have made my position more prominent than that of the Primaeval Ones...I have used the roads of eternity to the dawn, I go up in my flight, and there is no god who can do what I have done...I am Horus, more distant of place than men or gods; I am Horus son of Isis."³²⁸

It will be noted that Horus's speech bears a curious resemblance to the alleged boast of Helel ben Shahar as recounted by Isaiah. Recall again the famous words that the Hebrew prophet ascribed to the rebel star:


"I shall ascend the heavens; above the stars of El I shall raise high my throne; and I shall sit on the Mount of Assembly on the slopes of Saphon; I shall ascend above the heights of the clouds, I shall make myself like Elyon'."³²⁹

³²⁷ Line 217 as translated in R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Oxford, 1973), p. 125.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 223-226.

³²⁹ *Isaiah* 14:12-15.

Helel's ascent places him above the stars of El, much as Horus's ascent elevates him above the other gods of the sky. Helel's goal, as clearly stated by Isaiah, is to sit atop the Mount of Assembly (Saphon). Is there any evidence, then, that Horus's ascent to heaven occurs in conjunction with a celestial Mountain?

In the aforementioned Spell from the Coffin Texts the goal of Horus's ascent is the *akhet*, translated by Faulkner as "horizon." Yet as numerous Egyptologists have pointed out, the word in question has absolutely nothing to do with the modern astronomical concept.³³⁰ Rather, a translation "Mountain of Light" is to be preferred.³³¹ The fact that the ideogram denoting the celestial *akhet*——conjoins the Egyptian sign for mountain (*ḏw*) and that for "sun" is consistent with this view. Thus, if we are to assign a concrete meaning to this particular ideogram, the *akhet* would appear to have reference to a "twin-peaked" mountain associated with the place of sunrise.³³² Yet this seemingly self-evident definition begs the question: Where is such a mountain to be found in the current skies?

Especially significant for the thesis developed here is the fact that the Egyptian term *akhet* occasionally denoted *the far north*.³³³ As the World Mountain in the far north, the Egyptian *akhet* thus offers a close parallel to the Mount of Assembly associated with Helel, likewise located "in the far north."³³⁴ In light of these correspondences between the myths involving the Egyptian Morning Star and the Hebrew Helel, it is most relevant to find that *Harachte*—"Horus of the *akhet*"—was expressly identified with the planet Mars in Egyptian astronomical texts dating to the New Kingdom period (ca. 1473 BCE).³³⁵ In fact, everything we know about the Egyptian god is consistent with his identification with the red planet.³³⁶

³³⁰ J. Assmann, "Horizont," *LÄ 2* (Wiesbaden, 1977), col. 3. There Assmann writes: "Achet (*ḏΔt*) bezeichnet einen konkreten Ort und nicht etwa (wie unser 'H[orizont]') eine gedachte (Kreis-)Linie." See also K. Sethe, *Altägyptische Vorstellungen vom Lauf der Sonne* (Berlin, 1938), p. 9.

³³¹ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), p. 354 writes: "The word usually translated 'horizon' means, really, 'Land of Light' or 'Mountain of Light'."

³³² See the entry "Horizon," in I. Shaw & P. Nicholson eds., *British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London, 2002), p. 132.

³³³ J. Assmann, "Horizont," *LÄ 2* (Wiesbaden, 1977), col. 4 writes: "Andererseits ist diese Beziehung [i.e., the *akhet*'s relationship to the eastern horizon] nicht so fest, daß nicht gelegentlich das Wort Achet auch einmal als Bezeichnung des 'fernen Nordens', einer Art 'ultimate thule', verwendet werden könnte."

³³⁴ *Isaiah* 14:13 as translated by M. Heiser, "The Mythological Provenance of Isa. XIV 12-15: A Reconsideration of the Ugaritic Material," *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001), p. 354.

Other details in the Egyptian traditions surrounding Horus recall events in the mythological careers of Helel and Athtar. Helel and Athtar, as we have seen, were each associated with an assembly of stars atop the World Mountain (Ugaritic texts speak of an “assembly of stars”—*pkr kkbm*).³³⁷ Egyptian texts likewise preserve memory of Horus’s intimate connection to a celestial assembly comprised of stars—hence the epithet *Hr sbā ht*, “Horus, star of the corporation.”³³⁸ This particular epithet appears in inscriptions dating to circa 2900 BCE, thereby attesting to the extreme antiquity of such conceptions.

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In describing the assembly of stars or “gods” that distinguished the primordial cosmos, the Egyptian scribes often used the term *p@r*, signifying a circling around of the stars in question.³³⁹

This word is cognate with that used to describe the celestial assembly in Ugaritic lore: *p@r kkbm*

or, alternately, *pΔr mœd*.³⁴⁰ This linguistic evidence suggests that the stars that comprised the

Divine Assembly or “Corporation” in Egyptian lore were circumpolar in nature and formerly appeared to “circle about” the celestial pole in full view of the terrestrial skywatchers.

The Ascent to Heaven

A dominant theme in the Pyramid Texts finds the deceased king seeking to emulate Horus by ascending to heaven in order to reach the region of the Imperishable Stars, the latter conventionally identified as the circumpolar stars.³⁴¹ The following passage is representative in this regard: “May you go up as Horus of the Netherworld who is at the head of the Imperishable Stars.”³⁴² The very same idea is apparent in the following passage:

³³⁵ O. Neugebauer & R. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts, Vol. 3* (London, 1960), p. 179. See also R. Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten* (Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 35-36.

³³⁶ E. Cochrane, *On Fossil Gods and Forgotten Worlds* (Ames, 2010), pp. 139-149.

³³⁷ KTU 1.10.I.4.

³³⁸ T. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London, 2001), p. 119.

³³⁹ C. Eyre, *The Cannibal Hymn* (Liverpool, 2002), pp. 125-126.

³⁴⁰ KTU 1.10.I.4.

³⁴¹ J. Allen, “The Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts,” in W. Simpson ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 4.

³⁴² PT 1301.

“R’œ summons you into the zenith(?) of the sky as...Horus *Ōnty-mnit-f*; may he set you as the Morning Star in the midst of the Field of Rushes. The door of the sky at the horizon opens for you, the gods are glad at meeting you as the star which crosses the sea below the under-part of the sky in this dignity of yours which issued from the mouth of R’œ. May you sit on this iron throne of yours as the Great One who is in On, may you lead the spirits and propitiate the Imperishable Stars.”³⁴³

Here, once again, we notice the Morning Star’s express capacity for ascending to heaven and residing amongst the circumpolar stars—a basic theme of the Helel myth. Although most clearly described in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts, analogous testimony is preserved by the indigenous Chorti of Guatemala, who renamed the star after a famous Catholic saint: “Santiago is the one who climbs to the highest sky...”³⁴⁴ The climbing Santiago, in turn, recalls the aforementioned Zuñi tradition wherein the mythical Morning Star was described as climbing to heaven along a chain of arrows. Indeed, the Morning Star’s dramatic scaling of the heights of heaven is attested in sacred traditions on every inhabited continent and thus it must be numbered amongst the most archaic and treasured of human memories.

Horus Duat

In addition to being invoked as *NeṚer Dua*, “Morning Star,” Horus was also known by the epithet *Duat*, denoting him as god “of the Netherworld.” Indeed, in the Pyramid Texts Horus Duat is explicitly identified with the “Morning Star”: “O Morning Star, Horus of the Netherworld, divine Falcon, *wāḏāḏ*-bird whom the sky bore...”³⁴⁵ The fact that the epithets *Neter Dua* and Horus *Duat* are here set in apposition is a clear indication that they referenced the same celestial object.

³⁴³ PT 1719-1722.

³⁴⁴ M. Preuss, “A Study of Jurakán of the Popol Vuh,” in E. Magana & P. Mason eds., *Myth and the Imaginary in the New World* (Laramie, 1986), p. 382.

³⁴⁵ PT 1207.

The word Duat is written with the following determinative—**K**—compelling evidence that the Egyptian Netherworld was conceptualized as being celestial in nature at the time of the development of the hieroglyphic script. The same conclusion is supported by a passage from the Pyramid Texts, wherein the same star is located in the Mansion of Nut, the latter clearly located in the sky:

“Recitation by Nut the great who dwells in the Mansion of *ḥit*: The King is my son of my desire; I have given to him the Netherworld that he may preside over it as Horus who presides over the Netherworld.”³⁴⁶

As to the origins of the word Duat, Egyptologists have observed that the word is almost certainly derived from the root *dwꜥ*, “morning, dawn,” whence comes the Horus-star’s epithet *Neter Dua*.³⁴⁷ The etymology of Duat, in turn, suggests that Horus’s identity as the “Lord of the Netherworld” is indissolubly connected to his role as the mythical “Morning Star.”

If this much seems clear, the question arises as to why the ancient Egyptians perceived a relationship between the Morning Star and the Netherworld? Why would one star, rather than another, be invoked as the “Lord of the Netherworld”? It would be interesting to know, moreover, whether this particular conception is peculiar to ancient Egypt. So far as I’m aware, this question has never been posed previously, much less investigated in anything resembling a systematic fashion.

As it turns out, the question is easily answered insofar as analogous conceptions are attested around the globe. In ancient Ugaritic tradition, as we documented earlier, the mythical Morning Star was known as Athtar and he was described as Lord of the Netherworld: “And he ruled over the Underworld [’arꜥ], god of all of it.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ PT 5.

³⁴⁷ J. Allen, “The Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts,” in J. Allen et al eds., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1989), p. 23.

³⁴⁸ KTU 1.6.12 as quoted in H. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

The Morning Star was intimately associated with the Underworld in the indigenous religions of the New World as well. Thus, the *Codex Chimalpopoca* reports that Quetzalcoatl sojourned in the Underworld (Mictlan) prior to his glorious ascent to heaven as the Morning Star and subsequent enthronement:

“The elders used to say that he was transformed into the star that comes out at dawn...They said that when he died, he did not appear for four days, because then he was dwelling amongst the dead (Mictlan); and that also by the fourth day he was provided with arrows; so that on the eighth day the great star appeared (Venus, the Morning Star), that they call Quetzalcoatl. And they added that it was then that he was enthroned as Lord.”³⁴⁹

If, according to the *Codex Chimalpopoca*, Quetzalcoatl experienced a temporary sojourn in the Underworld prior to his glorious ascent to heaven as the Morning Star and subsequent enthronement, other sources hint at a longer stay. According to the Franciscan Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, the god resided actually there: “And elsewhere he built a house all underground at a place called Mictlan.”³⁵⁰

Analogous traditions are attached to the Aztec god Cinteotl, commonly identified with the Morning Star: Of this god it was reported that “he put himself into the earth” and thereby established the underworld.³⁵¹ Evident here is the widespread Mesoamerican belief that the underworld was located in the center of the earth.³⁵²

Yet Cinteotl was also celebrated as the “first light” to appear at Creation: “Cinteotl, also called *Itztlacoliuhqui*, was the ‘Morning Star,’ or ‘the first light of the world.’”³⁵³ As the “first light of the world,” Cinteotl naturally recalls Tlauizcalpanteuctli and Quetzalcoatl, both of whom were accorded similar epithets as the mythical Morning Star whose inaugural appearance announced Creation. Yet if that much is obvious, the question remains: How are we to understand the strange report that Cinteotl, as the Morning Star, “put himself into the earth”?

³⁴⁹ *Codex Chimalpopoca* 11 as translated in E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), p. 20.

³⁵⁰ A. Anderson & C. Dibble eds., *Florentine Codex, Book 3* (Santa Fe, 1978), p. 37.

³⁵¹ M. Graulich, *Myths of Ancient Mexico* (Norman, 1997), p. 268.

³⁵² A. Stone, *Images from the Underworld* (Austin, 1995), p. 40, quoting Sahagún: “Indeed it [hell] is a very great cave, there in the middle of the earth.”

³⁵³ M. Graulich, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

An important clue is to be found in the Skidi Creation myth, quoted at the outset of this study. Recall again that, in the myth in question, it was reported that the Morning Star, as the planet Mars, was the first light to appear in the sky. The same tribal tradition reports that Morning Star/Mars entered into the “center of the earth” at the Dawn of Time in order to pursue and eventually impregnate Venus, thereby bringing life and fertility into the world. Indeed the Skidi priests periodically celebrated a ritual drama reenacting these formative events, wherein the Morning Star was made to announce:

“Chiefs, priests, warriors, old men, I have destroyed the regions once controlled by the mysterious woman who wanted darkness forever...In the center of the earth in darkness he found the woman [Venus], conquered her, touched her with his war club, and turned her into the earth.”³⁵⁴

Although it is somewhat disconcerting to find the Morning Star being described as journeying to “the center of the earth in darkness,” this particular Skidi tradition offers an intriguing parallel to the Ugaritic myth surrounding Athtar, wherein it is reported that the former king of the universe descended into the *’ar*, or earth, the latter being an archaic designation of the Netherworld.³⁵⁵ The darkness associated with the center of the earth in Skidi lore, in turn, recalls the formulaic epithet “Dark Earth” commonly applied to the Netherworld by various cultures around the globe.³⁵⁶

In order to understand the Morning Star’s peculiar propensity for “entering into the earth” or Underworld, it is instructive to remember the Skidi tradition that the “earth” in question was inseparable from the planet Venus (see above).³⁵⁷ Indeed, there is a wealth of evidence that the primeval “earth” of cosmogonical myth shared a fundamental affinity with the planet Venus. In ancient Mesopotamia, for example, a traditional epithet of Inanna/Venus was *ki-sikil*, literally “pure earth.” The planet-goddess is also identified as an earth goddess in Sumerian god-lists: “Her claim to the role of earth goddess is based on her identification, as Inanna, with *Antum=ki*, the terrestrial consort of the Heaven-god.”³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ R. Linton, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁵⁵ D. Katz, *The Image of the Netherworld in Sumerian Sources* (Bethesda, 2003), p. 8.

³⁵⁶ M. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 2007), p. 234.

³⁵⁷ See also Robert Hall, *An Archaeology of the Soul: North American Indian Beliefs and Ritual* (Champaign-Urbana, 1997), p. 87 who rightly notes that, for the Skidi, the Evening Star embodies a “symbolic identity with the earth.”

³⁵⁸ W. Hallo & J. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven, 1968), p. 61.

The traditions surrounding the Skidi Morning Star and Aztec Cinteotl help to elucidate the old crux posed by Hesiod's statement that Aphrodite held Phaethon II captive in the *innermost regions* of her celestial temple. For if Aphrodite is to be identified as the planet Venus, as I have argued here, it stands to reason that Phaethon's captivity or "hiding" at the hands of the latter goddess likely involved his confinement within the "heart" or innermost core of a celestial "earth" or Underworld, the latter constituting a veritable Venusberg. Nietzsche's friend Erwin Rohde appears to have discerned this meaning well over a century ago:

“καὶ δ’ ἐν Ἀθήνῃσ’ εἶσεν, ἐὼ ἐνὶ πτόνι νηῶ. These words may be kept in mind in order to explain the mysterious narrative in Hesiod *Th[eogony]* 987ff. of Phaethon whom Aphrodite ὥρτ’ ἀνερεινυμένη καὶ μιν ζαθέοις ἐνὶ νήοις νηοπόλον μύχιον ποιήσατο, δαίμονα δῖον. Aphr[odite], in fact, ‘translated’ Phaethon alive and made him immortal—within her own temple just as Athene had Erechtheus. Perhaps Phaethon was translated beneath the ground under the temple—the adj. μύχιον may mean this. θεοὶ μύχιοι are those that rule over the μυχός of a house, e.g. over the θάλαμος as the inmost chamber: thus Ἀφροδίτη μυχία (Ael., *HA*, x.34). Λητὼ μυχία (Plu. ap. Eus., *PE*. iii. 1,3. p.84c.). A goddess called simply *Μυχία* ins. fr. Mytilene, *GDI*. 255. But μύχιοι could also mean dwellers in the depths of the earth (μυχῶ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης, Hes., *Th*. 119; more commonly in the plural μυχοὶ χθονός, see Markland on Eur., *Sup*. 545; cf. Ἄϊδος μυχός, *AP*. vii, 213, 6 (Archias); also μυχὸς εὐσεβέων, ἀθανάτων under the earth, *Epigr. Gr*. 241 a, 18; 658 a; *Rh. Mus*. 34, 192). Thus (of the Erinyes) Orph. *H*. 69, 3 μύχιαι, ὑπὸ κεύθεσιν οἰκί’ ἔχουσai ἄντρω ἐν ἡρόεντι. Phot. 274, 18, μυχόπεδον· γῆς βάθος, Ἄιδης.)”³⁵⁹

As noted by Rohde, the fact that Hesiod elsewhere employed a similar word—*mukhós*—to describe “the dwellers in the depths of the earth” strongly implies that he understood Phaethon to have suffered a similar fate upon being hidden by Aphrodite.³⁶⁰ Nagy, in his insight-laden discussion of the Phaethon myth, seems to agree with Rohde's analysis in this regard:

“The adjective *múkhios* ‘secreted’ describing Phaethon in *Theogony* 991 implies a stay in the underworld, as we see from the usage of *mukhós* ‘secret place’ in *Theogony* 119. As for Aphrodite, the goddess who abducted Phaethon and made him *múkhios*, she herself is known as *Mukhiā* in the context of one of her cults (as at Gyaros...).”³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ E. Rohde, *Psyche*, Vol. I (London, 1925), p. 111.

³⁶⁰ *Theogony* 119.

Gloria Ferrari has recently returned to the puzzle presented by Aphrodite's "hiding" of Phaethon in a wide-ranging study of Alcman's *Partheneion*. There she called attention to a passage in Euripides's *Phaethon* wherein the dead body of Helios's son is described as hidden away by his mother Clymene: "I shall hide him in the shiny chambers."³⁶² The word translated as "shiny chambers" here is *thalamoi*, signifying "tomb" as well as the bridal chamber and/or the inner room.³⁶³ As Ferrari points out, Clymene's hiding of Phaethon recalls Aphrodite's hiding of Phaethon II in Hesiod:

"These figures of confinement, enclosure, and concealment establish an unequivocal link between this Phaethon and Phaethon the son of Eos, whom Aphrodite abducts in the *Theogony*. The latter is also hidden, *mukhios*, 'innermost', invisible, and he too overlooks the goddess's riches as the 'steward' of her temple. As Wilamowitz argued and later on, on different grounds, Nagy, we have not two different Phaethons but one and the same, whose legend is part of a cosmological construct in which he becomes Eosphorus. That it is mentioned in the *Partheneion* further confirms that Phaethon's union with Aphrodite, by which he disappears, is not an invention of Euripides."³⁶⁴

Aphrodite's secreting away of Phaethon, as we have seen, is far from unique in Greek mythology. The same goddess is elsewhere said to have hidden Adonis within a coffin-like chest. With regards to this particular tradition, Walter Burkert was led to observe: "What an idea to hide the beloved one in a larnax, a coffin, and send him to the nether world, of all places!"³⁶⁵

Yet as we have documented here this is precisely the fate of the mythical Morning Star—to be hidden away within, or otherwise consigned to, the Netherworld! The fact that analogous traditions surround the Mexican god Quetzalcoatl, explicitly identified with the Morning Star, suggests that we are dealing with a universal mythological motif. Thus it is that the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* report that the god-man was hidden in a stone chest within the temple

³⁶¹ G. Nagy, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

³⁶² 221-223.

³⁶³ G. Ferrari, *Alcman and the Cosmos of Sparta* (Chicago, 2008), p. 63.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁶⁵ W. Burkert, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

walls, wherein he remained concealed in order not to offend his followers because of his grotesque appearance:

“For his eyelids were very bulging, his eyes sunken, and his face covered with swellings, quite unlike a normal person. He then declares his resolve that his people will never see him as he is, that he is determined to remain there permanently in seclusion.”³⁶⁶

The *Anales*’ strange report of Quetzalcoatl’s seclusion or “hiding” in a chest within the temple walls forms a striking analogue to Euripides’s account of the hiding of Phaethon within an underground crypt (*thalamoi*). That said, the similarity has remained virtually unexplored by students of comparative mythology, presumably because scholars rarely consider the possibility that astronomical events might be encoded within the sacred traditions reported by the ancient mythmakers. Properly understood, Quetzalcoatl’s seclusion in the stone chest—like Adonis’s hiding in the *lárnax* at the hands of Aphrodite—implies a stay in the Underworld.

It is in ancient Egypt, however, that the hiding away of the Morning Star by the Venusian mother goddess is most clearly described and delineated. We have documented that Horus was explicitly identified as the Morning Star *and* as the Lord of the Duat, or Underworld. The Duat, moreover, was described by the term *ḥwt-ḥwt*, denoting it as a “secret, hidden, inaccessible place.”³⁶⁷

Yet as various scholars have recognized, the Duat is also identified with a region located *within* the mother goddess’s body:

“The goddess exists not only in the sky that people can see above them, but her interior is equated with the Duat, the Netherworld, that which is below the earth, into which the sun descends. Here Nut, or at least her belly, is equated with a ‘secret cavern’ from which the sun will be born again.”³⁶⁸

The idea that the Horus-star resided within Nut’s belly or heart is a recurring theme in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts and forms a prominent motif in the peculiar ideology that governed ancient funerary practices—namely, that which found the Pharaoh attempting to re-create or “re-

³⁶⁶ H. Nicholson, *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs* (Boulder, 2001), p. 42.

³⁶⁷ J. Allen, *Genesis in Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, 1988), p. 80.

³⁶⁸ B. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (Norman, 1999), p. 44.

actualize” Horus’s experience in his own post-mortem peregrinations. Thus it is that various passages describing the primeval “daybreak” speak of the Horus-star entering the “belly of Nut/womb of the sky.”³⁶⁹ Recall again a passage quoted previously, wherein it is specifically said that Horus Duat resides in the “heart” (*jb*) of Nut:

“Recitation by Nut, the Elder One in the Midst of in [sic] the Enclosure of Shenit. Teti is my son of my heart. I have given him the Duat, that he might become foremost in it as Horus, foremost of the Duat.”³⁷⁰

Such archaic conceptions resurfaced much later in Egyptian texts of the Hellenistic period, wherein it was still remembered that the Underworld was to be found in the “heart” or belly of the sky-goddess Nut.³⁷¹ Egyptian artworks, in fact, show the infant Horus enclosed within an oval-shaped structure within Nut’s body, the latter denoted as *hn* and conceptualized as a coffin.³⁷² And as Wolfgang Waitkus has documented in great detail, the history of the Horus-star’s confinement within Nut and subsequent spectacular appearance eventually became adapted to describe the familiar sunrise:

“Das blasenförmige Gebilde wird in den Beischriften als *hn* bezeichnet. *hn* bedeutet soviel wie ‘Kasten, Behälter’ und kann unter anderen sowohl den Leib, den Bauch oder den Schädel eines Menschen bezeichnen...In späten Texten ist die Vorstellung belegt, daß die Sonne des Morgens aus dem *hn*-Behälter der Himmelsgöttin Nut aufgeht. Hier wird *hn* wohl den Leib bzw. den Bauch der Himmelsgöttin bezeichnen.”³⁷³

The parallel between Horus’s seclusion within the Duat (as the Morning Star) and Phaethon’s being secreted away in the innermost region of the earth could hardly be more precise in nature and provides compelling evidence that Aphrodite’s paramour is to be identified with the mythical “Morning Star.” Indeed, it is our conclusion that the Hesiodic myth of the hiding of Phaethon II encodes celestial events—specifically, the concealment of the mythical Morning Star

³⁶⁹ PT 532, for example.

³⁷⁰ PT 5 as translated in J. Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

³⁷¹ W. Waitkus, “Die Geburt des Harsomtut aus der Blüte. Zur Bedeutung und Funktion einiger Kultgegenstände des Tempels von Dendera,” *ZÄS* 30 (2002), p. 379 writes: “Die Unterwelt ist andererseits aber auch das Innere der Himmelsgöttin Nut.”

³⁷² See figure 9 in *Ibid.*, p. 379.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

(as Mars) *within* the planet Venus (as Aphrodite). Yet such traditions naturally beg the question: How are we to interpret the “hiding” away of the Morning Star within Aphrodite?

In our historical reconstruction, the “hiding” of the Morning Star Mars occurred during the tumultuous period just prior to Creation, at which time the cosmos was enshrouded in darkness. Although mythological interpretations of these extraordinary celestial events are manifold and more than a bit obscure, a common interpretation conceptualized the hiding of Mars as its “burial” or imprisonment within a Venusian Underworld or coffin of some sort. After spending an indeterminate period of time in seclusion or “hiding,” the Morning Star “sprang” forth from the “earth/netherworld” in spectacular nova-like splendor, thereby bringing light to the catastrophically eclipsed cosmos. It is this latter event that is remembered as the prototypical appearance of the Morning Star during the time of Beginning, the prototypical “dawn” or “daybreak,” a central theme of Creation in ancient Egypt as well as in Mesoamerica and elsewhere around the globe.³⁷⁴

The Egyptian traditions, in addition to providing compelling evidence that the Horus-star was indelibly connected to the Underworld (Duat), report that the star was stationed or otherwise “hidden” in the Underworld prior to making its inaugural appearance as the “Morning Star.” Witness the following tradition from Horus’s temple at Edfu, wherein the star-god is explicitly linked to the break of dawn *in illo tempore*:

“Perhaps the clearest example is found in the theophany connected with the break of dawn. When Horus appears from the dark underworld he is described as *the one with a head beautiful of face, the Hovering-one spreading real marvels, making the darkness mǣ with his wings.*”³⁷⁵

In addition to bringing light to a world engulfed in preternatural darkness, the Morning Star Horus also dispels the darkness and brings order to the cosmos—this is the implicit meaning of the term *mǣ*. Indeed, as Finnestad pointed out in his incisive commentary on the Edfu texts detailing the star-god’s formative role in Creation: “Making the darkness *mǣ* means, dispelling the darkness and thus turning chaos into cosmos.”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, “The Light-Bringer,” *Chronology & Catastrophism Review* (2015), pp. 29-38.

³⁷⁵ R. Finnestad, *Image of the World and Symbol of the Creator* (Wiesbaden, 1985), p. 98.

As I have documented elsewhere, the Egyptian account of the inaugural appearance of the Morning Star agrees in certain important respects with that preserved in the Quiché Maya account of Creation. In the *Popol Vuh* the prototypical appearance of the Morning Star occurred during a primeval “dawning” recalled as the first day:

“They fixed their eyes on the dawn, looking steadfastly for the coming forth of the sun. They occupied themselves in looking for the Great Star, called Icoquih, which appears first before the birth of the sun. The face of this Green Morning Star always appears at the coming forth of the sun.”³⁷⁷

The Quiché word translated as “green” here is *raxa*, signifying “green, new, fresh, sudden, regenerated, revived.”³⁷⁸ This epithet begs the following question: How are we to understand the Quiché report that the prototypical Morning Star presented a “greenish,” new, or rejuvenated appearance?³⁷⁹

A definitive answer to this query can be found in the Egyptian traditions surrounding the prototypical appearance of the Morning Star. Thus it is that Spell 519, quoted above, describes the Horus-star as greenish in appearance:

“O Morning Star, Horus of the Netherworld, divine Falcon, *wāḏāḏ*-bird whom the sky bore...”³⁸⁰

The word *wāḏāḏ*, left untranslated by Faulkner, translates literally as “great green.”³⁸¹ Yet the same word also denotes “fresh,” “to make green,” and “to make flourish.”³⁸²

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁷⁷ A. Christenson, *Popol Vuh* (New York, 2003), p. 218.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ In his commentary on this passage, Christenson opines: “It is unclear whether this refers to the green color of the planet Venus, or whether it refers to the life-generating power of the Morning Star to assist in the birth of the sun.”

³⁸⁰ PT 1207-1210.

As we have documented elsewhere, the spectacular greening of the cosmos associated with the inaugural appearance of the Morning Star (Mars) formed an unforgettable phase in the unfolding of Creation and gave rise to the widespread belief that that particular Star—together with Venus—had brought fertility to the world with its various activities *in illo tempore*.³⁸³ The Skidi Pawnee description of Creation is exemplary in this regard:

“In the creation story, fruitfulness and light had come into the world because Morning Star and his realm of light had conquered and mated with Evening Star in her realm of darkness.”³⁸⁴

Equally important to elucidating the manifold symbolism attached to the “greening” of the Morning Star is the fact that the color green had a symbolic association with regeneration and resurrection for the Quiché (The epithet attached to the Morning Star at the time of Creation in the *Popol Vuh*, it will be remembered, was *raxa*, denoting “green” but also “new” and “regenerated”). And so it is that, when Quetzalcoatl emerged from the Underworld transfigured into the prototypical “Morning Star,” he appeared as a brilliant green bird. Witness the following account from the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*:

“And when he was fully adorned then with his own hand he set himself on fire, he offered himself up in flame...And it is said that even as he burned, his ashes emerged and arose...And when the ashes were extinguished, then arose his heart, the quetzal bird itself; they saw it. And so they knew he had entered the sky within the sky. The old ones used to say that he was transformed to the dawn star; thus it is said that when Quetzalcoatl died this star appeared, and so he is named Tlahuizcalpanteuctli, ‘Lord of the Dawn House.’”³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ Samuel Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts Vol. 2* (New York, 1952), p. 597, in his commentary on this passage, wrote as follows: “The personage addressed by the lector at this point is called the morning star (1719f), who is none other than Horus of the *Dâ.t*, the divine falcon (cf. 748b), the ‘great green’ (cf. 1720c=802b)...The term translated ‘great green’ is *wâdâd* (cf. 1530a; also Heb. *yerakrak* and Eth. *warakrik*), which is a reduplication of the word *wâd*, ‘green’.”

³⁸² R. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1991), p. 55.

³⁸³ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 88-90.

³⁸⁴ G. Weltfish, *The Lost Universe* (New York, 1965), p. 106.

The quetzal bird was prized for its iridescent green color, thereby suggesting that Quetzalcoatl's ascending "heart" was greenish in color. Enrique Florescano describes the bird in question as follows:

"The green plumed *quetzal*, the most beautiful bird of the tropical jungle. The quetzal's brilliant and brightly colored feathers were a synonym for magnificence, splendor, and wealth for Mesoamerican peoples. 'The feather filaments are light, long, and glossy, so that the smallest movement sets them shimmering. And the color, a gilded emerald haunted by a deep singing violet blue, is extraordinary'."³⁸⁶

The gilded emerald-green bird associated with the Mesoamerican star-god Quetzalcoatl—explicitly identified with the prototypical "Morning Star"—forms an obvious parallel to the brilliant green bird associated with the Egyptian star-god Horus, invoked as the "Morning Star."

To return to the Quiché Maya account of Creation marked by the "dawning" of the Morning Star—As Tedlock has documented with great erudition and insight, there is compelling testimony that the "dawning" in question occurred in the immediate aftermath of a period of uncanny and stifling darkness, during which the star-gods were said to be in "hiding":

"*How things were put in shadow and brought to light*: This is *ewaxib'al saqirib'al* [zaquiribal], 'being-hidden-instrument becoming-light-instrument.' The first word is built on a passive (-x) form of *ewaj*, which FV glosses as 'to hide' but then explains that it has to do with shadows or dark places. The second is built on an inchoative (-ir) form of *saq*, 'be light,' which is also found in *saqirik*, 'to dawn.'...The two words could also be translated as 'the hiding place, the dawning place,' since *-b'al* can either be instrumental or indicate place. The 'hiding place' would be *ewab'al siwan* or 'Concealment Canyon', where the gods were hidden away before the dawn (p. 158); the 'dawning place' would be the place (or places) where the founding ancestors of the ruling Quiché lineages were keeping vigil when the morning star and then the sun rose for the first time (p. 160), places which are referred to as *zaquiribal* [zakiribal]."³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* 11 as translated by M. Leon-Portilla et al eds., *In the Language of Kings: An Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature* (New York, 2001), p. 191.

³⁸⁶ E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), pp. 146-147.

³⁸⁷ D. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* (New York, 1985), p. 241.

Evident here is the idea that the “dawning” of the Morning Star as the prototypical “Daybringer” occurred in the wake of a period of apocalyptic darkness wherein the star was imprisoned or “hidden” within the Underworld. And so it is that, in the indigenous traditions surrounding Quetzalcoatl, it is reported that the god “disappeared” into the Underworld prior to metamorphosing into the “Morning Star” and becoming enthroned as King of the Cosmos:

“The elders used to say that he was transformed into the star that comes out at dawn...They said that when he died, he did not appear for four days, because then he was dwelling amongst the dead (*Mictlan*); and that also by the fourth day he was provided with arrows; so that on the eighth day the great star appeared (Venus, the Morning Star), that they call Quetzalcoatl. And they added that it was then that he was enthroned as Lord.”³⁸⁸

Mictlan itself, moreover, is specifically located in the center of the earth. Witness the following statement of Bancroft: “Mictlan was situated in the antipodean regions, or rather in the centre of the earth, to which the term ‘dark and pathless regions’ also applies.”³⁸⁹

The key to understanding such traditions—as also the manifold symbolism attending ancient funerary practices—is the fact that the Morning Star itself was at one time located in the center or innermost core of the cosmic “earth,” exactly as reported in the Aztec myth of Cinteotl.

In summary: Far from being a figurative interpretation of the regularly recurring appearance of Venus in the eastern dawn sky, the Creation accounts surrounding the Morning Star in ancient Egypt and Mesoamerica describe a *singular* and decidedly *catastrophic* astronomical event *in illo tempore*—specifically, the spectacularly glorious appearance of the planet Mars in the midst of extraordinary cosmic upheaval, during which time darkness threatened to destroy the cosmos and heaven became separated from earth.

The Morning Star was identified as the “Lord of the Underworld” precisely because it was formerly stationed in the “heart” of a celestial Underworld—one indissolubly connected with the planet Venus. Hitherto overlooked by all students of comparative mythology, the primeval “hiding” of the Morning Star within the Venusian Underworld constitutes an archetypal

³⁸⁸ Quoted from E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), p. 20. See also the so-called *Legend of the Suns*, wherein it is reported that “Quetzalcoatl went to hell (*Mictlan*).” Quoted from *Ibid.*, p. 177.

³⁸⁹ H. Bancroft, *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, Vol. 3 (San Francisco, 1883), p. 536.

mythological theme, the understanding of which is absolutely essential to deciphering the original celestial context behind ancient accounts of Creation. For it was precisely because it burst forth from the Underworld in a spectacular display of nova-like splendor that the “Morning Star” became conceptualized as the prototypical “light-bringer” and hero of Creation, credited with dispelling the all-encompassing darkness and restoring order to the cosmos. And it is precisely because the Morning Star was once hidden within the dark Underworld, as if “dead,” that its subsequent reemergence and apotheosis was widely conceptualized as a resurrection or rebirth (the greening of the cosmos attendant upon the prototypical appearance of the Morning Star was also integral to this symbolism, needless to say).

Remembered as the First Dawn, or as the dawning of a New Age, the inaugural appearance of the Morning Star came to represent the divine and historical prototype for the archetypal first Day, New Year, and Spring (the greening of the world). Indeed it is with explicit reference to this dramatic series of natural events that we would understand the Morning Star’s traditional role in heralding a New Year or Age. R. T. Rundle Clark captured the essence of the symbolism in question even though he had absolutely no inkling what natural events originally inspired the archaic traditions:

“The appearance of Horus in the sky just before dawn is the mark of the new year. Out of the fear and confusion of Seth’s reign, the time of troubles, has come the herald of the new dispensation. The world’s great age begins anew.”³⁹⁰

Hitherto dismissed as the stuff of legend and the product of figurative language, the archaic mythology and terminology surrounding the Morning Star have their origins in natural history. How else are we to explain the striking accord in the mythological traditions around the globe? Properly understood, the archaic names and epithets applied to the mythical Morning Star encode and commemorate a series of extraordinary *and* catastrophic astronomical events at the Dawn of Time and, as such, they constitute compelling evidence that such planetary catastrophes occurred and were witnessed by ancient cultures around the globe.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Conclusion

“Reflections such as these are sometimes objected to on the grounds that it is not permissible to treat myths in this way, to extract ‘schemas’ from them which are supposed to epitomize their substance but which, all too easily, only distort them. Let us be careful to distinguish between principle and practice. In particular cases, the analyst may very well deceive himself by regarding secondary traits as characteristic, and retaining them, while neglecting traits that are truly primary. He will have to reconsider every case in which this abuse has been diagnosed with serious arguments. But as to the opportunity, the necessity, of extracting the motivation and, accordingly, the meaning, the *raison d’être*, of a myth, there can be no yielding. For a believing society...a myth or an entire mythology is not a gratuitous product of fancy, but the repository of traditional wisdom.”³⁹¹

The hallmark of a credible historical reconstruction is that it resolves or otherwise illuminates problems that had previously seemed intractable. The best way to judge a new theory, in turn, is by comparing its ability to explain the relevant evidence against that of rival hypotheses. The vexing and long-standing mystery presented by the Greek myth of Phaethon’s incendiary fall from heaven offers an instructive test case for judging the relative merits of conventional approaches to mythological exegesis—inevitably uniformitarian in nature—against the *decidedly catastrophist* comparative methodology advocated by the present author.

A summary of the Greek Phaethon myth would include the following mythemes: (1) the ill-fated hero is described as the son of the Sun; (2) while acting as a substitute “sun” the hero’s rash behavior sparks a cosmic catastrophe marked by the fall of stars and worldwide conflagration; (3) the hero is “thunderbolted” or otherwise incinerated as a result of his rash behavior; (4) the hero is hurled from heaven and falls into a body of water; (5) the hero’s fall or “scorching” results in the formation of the Milky Way; (6) the hero is beloved by Aphrodite and, upon being abducted or “hidden” by her, becomes her underground “temple attendant” or paramour. It is notable that all but the last two mythemes are also to be found in the New World alloforms of the Phaethon-myth.

Among Classicists there is a general consensus that Phaethon is to be identified with the planet Venus, the latter view following naturally from his proverbial identification as the “Morning

³⁹¹ G. Dumezil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 48-49.

Star.” Yet no such consensus exists as to whether Helios’s son is to be identified with the *dáimōn* of the same name who, according to Hesiod and Pausanias, was beloved by Aphrodite.

A review of the voluminous literature on the subject reveals precious little discussion or insightful critical analysis with regards to how or why the various mythemes that characterize the Phaethon myth might be explained by reference to the planet Venus. Indeed, it is patently obvious that the Venusian “identification” has yet to produce a single compelling insight into the primary themes characterizing the Phaethon myth, to say nothing of its historical origins or proper mytho-historical context. And there the matter would stand—very much up in the air, so to speak—were the Greek sources alone to serve as the database for exegesis and analysis.

A comparative analysis of analogous traditions from the New World and the ancient Near East offers a possible way out of this impasse and helps to clarify the original celestial context of the Greek Phaethon myth. The Bella Coola Phaethon is described as covered in “sores,” a recurring—and it would appear distinctive—characteristic of the mythical “Morning Star” in Amerindian lore. Equally relevant is the fact that the Bella Coola hero, like his Kwakiutl counterpart, employs a chain of arrows as a makeshift ladder-to-heaven in order to visit the Sun, a mytheme elsewhere associated with “Morning Star” in the New World. Most telling, however, are the sacred traditions of the Cheyenne, Crow, and Lakota which report that it was the mythical Morning Star who fell from heaven as a meteor-like object, thereby recalling Ovid’s account of Helios’s son: “Phaëthon, fire ravaging his ruddy hair, is hurled headlong and falls with a long trail through the air; as sometimes a star from the clear heavens, although it does not fall, still seems to fall.”³⁹² This specific set of mythemes shared between the Amerindian “Phaethon” and “Morning Star”-heroes suggests that the two mythological figures trace to the same celestial body and share a similar history—one punctuated by extraordinary events of a catastrophic nature.

The aforementioned Amerindian traditions surrounding the mythical Morning Star serve to bolster and corroborate the long-standing belief among Classicists that the Greek Phaethon is to be identified with the Morning Star. That said, the Amerindian traditions offer zero support for the conventional view that Phaethon is to be identified with the planet Venus. On the contrary,

³⁹² *Metamorphoses*, Book II, lines 320-322 as translated by F. Miller (Cambridge, 1960), p. 83.

the evidence adduced here strongly suggests that the “Morning Star” of Amerindian myth is to be identified with the planet Mars. The Martian identification is explicit in Skidi Pawnee astronomical lore and, as we have documented in great detail, supported elsewhere by a wealth of circumstantial evidence.³⁹³ It is *the planet Mars*, not Venus, which was celebrated for climbing to heaven along a chain of arrows or ladder *in illo tempore*—witness the Makiritare Creation myth from South America, quoted earlier. The fact that analogous traditions surround the Akkadian Nergal and Australian Wayungari in the Old World, both of whom were identified with the red planet, provides compelling support for the hypothesis advocated here.³⁹⁴ Hence when we read that the Zuñi Morning Star once climbed to heaven along a chain of arrows it stands to reason that it was the planet Mars that was being described, not Venus. By the same logic, it follows that the ladder-climbing Phaethons of Bella Coola and Kwakiutl myth are best understood as representing the prototypical “Morning Star”—i.e., the planet Mars.

It is significant that the Amerindian Phaethons—like their Greek counterpart—are always masculine in nature and usually described as the “son of the Sun.” This is a perfectly suitable epithet for Mars but not for Venus, the latter planet typically being feminized and conceptualized as the Sun’s daughter or wife.³⁹⁵ A pronounced masculinity also marks the Phaethonesque figures from the ancient Near East—Helel ben Shahar and Athtar. Indeed, the Arabian “Morning Star” Athtar was conceptualized as the masculine power par excellence, thereby mirroring the Skidi Pawnee description of the planet Mars as the prototypical Morning Star.

In addition to corroborating Frazer’s claim that the basic outlines of the Phaethon myth are to be found in Amerindian traditions, the present study serves to complement previous studies that have sought to document thematic parallels between the Greek myth and ancient Near Eastern traditions surrounding Athtar and Helel. As we have argued, the Arabic (and Ugaritic) Athtar and Biblical Helel ben Shahar are best understood as personifications of the mythical Morning Star. Here too, however, we have found little evidence supporting their identification with the planet Venus, as per the conventional view. Rather, Athtar and Helel are both best understood as personifications of the planet Mars.

³⁹³ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 106-114.

³⁹⁴ E. Cochrane, “The Stairway to Heaven,” *Aeon* 5:1 (1997), pp. 69-78.

³⁹⁵ See the discussion in E. Cochrane, *The Many Faces of Venus* (Ames, 2001), pp. 7-34.

An important finding to emerge from previous scholarship is the explicit circumpolar context of the mythical events in question. Helel ben Shahar's great crime is that he seeks to ascend the Mount of Assembly in the far north. Athtar, likewise, is represented as climbing the very same Mount (Saphon). As Biblical scholars have long recognized, the Assembly in question is actually an assemblage of stars—*pΔr kkbm*—situated in the circumpolar north. The fact that analogous traditions surround the mythical Morning Star in other ancient cultures supports the essential celestial context of the Biblical account of Helel ben Shahar. Thus it is that the Egyptian Horus, as the mythical Morning Star, ascends to heaven and takes his place amongst the Imperishable Stars *in the north*.

A circumpolar context is also hinted at in Amerindian versions of the Phaethon myth. This is most evident in the Lakota tradition describing the birth of Morning Star, quoted earlier, wherein it is reported that the star was hurled down to earth from a hole in the uppermost heaven: "As she pulls out the turnip, a hole opens in the northern circumpolar star world."³⁹⁶ As we have documented, very similar stories were told about the Crow Morning Star and Kwakiutl Mink, both of whom were hurled down from a "hole" in heaven. The Lakota belief that the hole in heaven was circumpolar in nature conforms to a widespread tradition: Witness the Chukchee belief that the hole in heaven is located at the zenith "right under the base of the polar star."³⁹⁷

A systematic analysis of ancient myth will readily confirm that the various mythemes associated with the Greek Phaethon—enumerated above—find striking analogues in the biography of the prototypical Morning Star (Mars). Thus it is that the incineration of the Greek Phaethon not only finds a close parallel in the Bella Coola and Kwakiutl Phaethon myths, it is precisely mirrored in ancient traditions involving Morning Star, who is represented as suffering incineration in myths from as far afield as Mexico and Australia.³⁹⁸ Such widespread and converging traditions, in our view, constitute compelling circumstantial evidence that the Greek Phaethon and his most direct Amerindian analogues are to be identified with the mythical Morning Star.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ R. Goodman, *Lakota Star Knowledge* (Sinte Gleska, 1992), p. 3.

³⁹⁷ W. Bogoras, "The Folklore of Northeastern Asia, as Compared with that of Northwestern America," *American Anthropologist* 4 (1902), p. 590. See also A. Stone, *Images from the Underworld* (Austin, 1995), p. 37, who points out: "According to Mesoamerican beliefs, cosmic strata could be transitted through a hole that was identified with the empty space of a cave passage. In Yalcoba, Yucatan, a hole (*hol*), *u hol gloryah* 'the hole of heaven,' is conceived as penetrating the center of the sky and functions as a conduit of cosmic entry and exit." See also M. A. van der Sluijs, *Traditional Cosmology, Vol. 3* (London, 2011), pp. 219-221, 225-226.

³⁹⁸ E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 82-93, 111-114.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-93.

The analysis offered here allows us to resolve the long-standing debate as to whether or not it is possible to identify Hesiod's Phaethon with his more famous namesake: Phaethon II—like Helios's son—is to be identified with the mythical Morning Star. A decisive clue is the extraordinary beauty ascribed to Aphrodite's paramour, alleged to be capable of enticing the goddess of enticement herself. As we have adduced, the mythical Morning Star was renowned for its beauty and handsomeness around the globe. Thus, the Sikuni Indians of South America describe the Morning Star as “the handsomest man in the world.”⁴⁰⁰ This report finds a close parallel amongst the Blackfoot Indians of North America who remember Morning Star as a “young man with a beautiful face”⁴⁰¹ and as the “handsomest person” ever.⁴⁰² What is true of the New World is attested in the Old World as well. Thus, in Chinese lore the Morning Star is described as “a very handsome young man.”⁴⁰³ Such widespread traditions have their explanation in extraordinary celestial events and have nothing whatsoever to do with “the human condition,” as per Nagy's analysis quoted at the outset of this investigation.

The sublime beauty accorded Phaethon II finds a precise parallel in the sacred traditions surrounding Adonis, who was invoked by the epithet *nœmn*, “the beautiful, lovely one.”⁴⁰⁴

This attribute, together with ancient reports stating that he, too, was hidden by Aphrodite, has led several scholars to identify the Syrian hero with Hesiod's Phaethon. Yet Adonis himself was explicitly identified with the planet Mars by the astronomer Ptolemy, among others.⁴⁰⁵

Hesiod's account of Phaethon II, moreover, shares several mythemes in common with the so-called Star Woman cycle of myths.⁴⁰⁶ Hesiod describes Phaethon as a mortal *dáimōn* “snatched up to heaven” and compelled to serve as Aphrodite's temple attendant. This account finds a striking parallel in South American myth, wherein the mortal hero is described as whisked away to heaven and assigned a permanent residence alongside Star Woman, the latter of whom was explicitly identified as the planet Venus.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Sikuni Indians* (Los Angeles, 1992), p. 28.

⁴⁰¹ W. McClintock, *Old Indian Trails* (Boston, 1913), p. 236.

⁴⁰² G. Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* (New York, 1912), p. 98. Among the Plains Indians, Alice Kehoe, “Ethnoastronomy of the North American Plains,” in V. Del Chamberlain et al eds., *Songs From the Sky* (West Sussex, 2005), p. 127 notes a “wide repetition” of such ideas “as Morning Star as a handsome, virile young man.”

⁴⁰³ Y. Ke, *Dragons and Dynasties* (London, 1993), p. 32.

⁴⁰⁴ T. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection* (Stockholm, 2001), p. 126.

⁴⁰⁵ II, 3, 68.

⁴⁰⁶ E. Cochrane, *Starf*cker* (Ames, 2006), pp. 56-93.

In South American lore Star Woman's mortal paramour is described as "covered in sores," a mytheme found also in North American versions of the Phaethon myth. And much as the Bella Coola Phaethon is miraculously cured of his affliction, thereafter appearing "more pure and more handsome" so, too, is Star Woman's paramour suddenly beautified as a result of his "marriage" to her.⁴⁰⁷ A similar metamorphosis in appearance overcomes the Sikuani Morning Star who, although formerly covered in sores, is transformed into "the handsomest man in the world."⁴⁰⁸ The Greek Phaon—an apparent hypostasis of Phaethon II—is likewise described as "the most handsome man on earth" as a result of his magical metamorphosis at the hands of Aphrodite/Venus.⁴⁰⁹ In short, the extraordinary beauty accorded Star Woman's mortal paramour forms a precise parallel to the sublime beauty traditionally ascribed to Phaethon II.

Although Nagy was well aware of Aphrodite's identification with the planet Venus, this identification played a negligible role in his analysis of the Phaethon myth. Yet it is this very identification that proves decisive in deciphering the Greek myth in question: The Hesiodic myth of the goddess's hiding of Phaethon II encodes celestial events—specifically, the concealment of the nascent Morning Star (as Mars) *within* the planet Venus (as Aphrodite) during a period of apocalyptic darkness *in illo tempore*.

Additional volumes would be required to fully explore the many intriguing leads revealed by this study. Phaethon II's epithet describing him as a "son" of Eos recalls the name of his apparent double in ancient Cyprus—Aôos, derived from *heôs*—as also the archaic Greek name for the Morning Star: Heosphoros. As the "bringer of dawn" or light, Heosphoros naturally reminds us of the Amerindian traditions describing Morning Star as the "first light" or dawn-bringer. Witness the description of Quetzalcoatl in the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, quoted earlier: "Properly speaking, the first light that appeared in the world."⁴¹⁰ The *Codex Vaticanus Latinus* contains a very similar report regarding Quetzalcoatl's alter ego Tlahuizcalpanteuctli, "Lord of the House of Dawn," universally recognized as the Morning Star:

"This was the Dawn god or the god of Light when day wants to come in...at daybreak. They say that it was created before the sun."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-72.

⁴⁰⁸ J. Wilbert & K. Simoneau, *Folk Literature of the Sikuani Indians* (Los Angeles, 1992), pp. 25-28.

⁴⁰⁹ Aelian, *Varia historia* 12, 18.

⁴¹⁰ E. Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* (Austin, 1995), p. 262.

Amerindian traditions describing the “Morning Star” as the “first light” to appear at Creation echo the Skidi report that it was the planet Mars, as the mythical Morning Star, that was the first star to appear at Creation. The Skidi report, in turn, is corroborated by the Makiritare tradition that Mars was the first star to appear at Creation upon climbing the ladder-to-heaven. In short, the evidence of ancient myth supports the conclusion that the “first star” to appear in heaven—the prototypical “Morning Star”—was the red planet and not Venus. Such traditions, like the Phaethon myth itself, have absolutely nothing to do with the regular movements of this or that planet in the familiar skies.

For Plato and other ancient Greeks, the myth of Phaethon served as the exemplary archetype for apocalyptic cataclysm. Ideas of apocalyptic cataclysm do not arise in a vacuum—much less from the vacuum of space—nor do they tell of mundane occurrences such as the daily setting of the solar orb. Rather, such globally attested mythological themes commemorate spectacular planetary catastrophes as witnessed by ancient man in the prehistoric period shortly before the rise of advanced civilization.

The book before the reader is presented as a case study in mythological exegesis. To what extent the author has succeeded in this exercise is for others to determine. Alas, the spectacular natural events that inspired the Phaethon myth have only been touched upon in the present study, primarily because a credible summary of the astronomical events in question is impossible apart from a full exposition of the Creation myth itself. Suffice it to say that such a study has been in the works for many years now and will be published in the not-too-distant future.

⁴¹¹ 3738, quoted from E. Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl* (Baltimore, 1999), p. 53.

Appendix One: Astarte's Falling Star

Philo's *Phoenician History*, as preserved by the Christian apologist Eusebius, includes a curious story that has generated a good deal of discussion and speculation over the centuries. The passage in question, allegedly citing Sanchuniathon as an ancient authority, reports that Astarte, the Phoenician goddess commonly invoked as the Queen of Heaven, once stumbled across a falling star and had it installed within her temple:

“When traveling around the world, she discovered a star which had fallen from the sky. She took it and consecrated it in Tyre, the holy island.”⁴¹²

The vast majority of scholars who have commented on this report have opined that the falling star in question was a meteor and meant to represent Astarte herself as the planet Venus. Albert Baumgarten, for example, writes as follows in his commentary on Philo's *History*:

“The star ‘fallen from the air’ which Astarte found must have been a meteorite. This statement of Philo's may be confirmed by numismatic evidence. An ovoid object, perhaps a meteorite in a portable shrine, is represented on several Tyrian coins of the third century A.D.”⁴¹³

It is equally probable that the falling star in question was another star altogether. Certainly this would make more sense than Astarte picking up a star representing herself. Attridge and Oden, the authors of the standard work on Philo's Phoenician history, suggested that the falling star represented Athtar, the Arabic Morning Star.⁴¹⁴ If so, we can understand Philo's report in light of the global traditions describing the Morning Star as a falling star, as documented elsewhere in this monograph.

The leading god of Tyre was Melqart and, in addition to being represented as Astarte's consort, he was also remembered as its mythical first king. There is some reason to conclude that Melqart was also identified with Athtar.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 1.10.17-18 as translated by Attridge and Oden, *Philo of Byblos: The Phoenician History* (Washington D.C., 1979), p. 55.

⁴¹³ A. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* (Leiden, 1981), p. 220.

⁴¹⁴ H. Attridge & R. Oden, *Philo of Byblos: The Phoenician History* (Washington D.C., 1979), p. 88.

Melqart was elsewhere invoked as “the fire from heaven.”⁴¹⁶ What exactly this means is by no means obvious, but it is well-known that analogous epithets were commonly associated with falling “stars”—i.e., meteors and thunderbolts—around the globe.⁴¹⁷

Given the evidence pointing to Melqart as a personification of the planet Mars, adduced in a previous chapter, it is probable that we should recognize a reference to the red planet in the epithet “fire from heaven.” Indeed, in Babylonian astronomical texts the red planet was explicitly associated with the “fall of fire”: “‘The Red star’ is equated first with ^d*bibbu* (udu.idim), ‘the planet’, and secondly with *miqtim*(ßub)^{tim} *ißâti*(izi), ‘the Fall of Fire’ ... An omen text contains a related comment: ... The Red star, Fall of Fire: Venus: concerning Mars...”⁴¹⁸

To return to Philo’s account of the falling star consecrated at Tyre—The very next sentence offers the well-known identification of Astarte with Aphrodite: “And the Phoenicians say that Astarte is Aphrodite.”⁴¹⁹ In light of the archaic identification of the Phoenician Queen of Heaven with the Greek Aphrodite *Urania*, it is worth considering the possibility that Hesiod’s tradition recounting Phaethon II’s installation in Aphrodite’s temple represents a Greek variation on the Tyrian tradition wherein Astarte installed a meteorite in her temple. Phaethon himself, of course, represents ancient mythology’s classic symbol of the “falling star.” His identification with the “Morning Star,” moreover, makes his resemblance to the Canaanite star god Athtar very close indeed. Given the fact that Melqart had an ancient and important cult on Cyprus—the alleged homeland of Aphrodite, according to Hesiod and Homer—it is possible that Hesiod learned of this Oriental tradition via that island.⁴²⁰ Who knows?

⁴¹⁵ N. Wyatt, “The Hollow Crown,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 18 (1986), p. 425 states simply: “Melqart, was a local form of ‘A@tar.’”

⁴¹⁶ M. Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 154.

⁴¹⁷ D. Kelley & E. Milone, *Exploring Ancient Skies* (London, 2011), p. 137.

⁴¹⁸ F. Reynolds, “Unpropitious Titles of Mars,” in J. Prosecky ed., *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East* (Prague, 1998), p. 349. See also M. A. van der Sluijs, “Phaethon and the Great Year,” *Apeiron* 39:1 (2006), pp. 83-84.

⁴¹⁹ I.10:21.

⁴²⁰ E. Lipinski, “The Inscribed Marble Vessels from Kition,” in Z. Zevit et al eds., *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots* (Winona Lake, 1995), pp. 433-442.

Appendix Two

There is an additional line of evidence that might be pursued with regard to Hesiod's account placing Phaethon within Aphrodite's temple. As is evident from the use of the word *múkhios*, Hesiod was apparently describing an underground chamber of some sort. This terminology immediately calls to mind an archaic and widespread belief that the ancient sun-god formerly resided in an underground chamber, the latter variously described as a cella, a coffin-like structure, or a rock. In ancient Mesopotamia, for example, the ancient sun-god was reputed to reside in an underground chamber known as *agrun* or *itima* and it was from there that the star was wont to arise. Thus an Old Babylonian hymn invokes Utu as follows: "Utu's rising from the *agrun*" (*dutu agrun-ta è-a-ni*).⁴²¹

The fact that the word *agrun*—like its Akkadian counterpart *kummu*—specifically describes the innermost chamber or room of a temple, house, or palace makes it especially germane to Hesiod's report that Phaethon resided within the innermost chamber of Aphrodite's temple.⁴²² That the word *agrun* was also employed to denote the innermost core of the earth or Underworld is also relevant to our thesis that the "Morning Star" made its inaugural appearance from within the Underworld. Witness the following commentary of Piotr Steinkeller:

"The sun god owns a residence in the nether world, called *agrun* or *kummu*.... Since *agrun* means primarily the underground abode of Enki (logographically *agrun* is E.NUN, 'house of the prince'), being therefore essentially identical with the Abzu, this term appears to designate autonomous enclaves in the nether world that remain beyond the control of Ereshkigal and related deities."⁴²³

The Sumerian sun-god is elsewhere said to spend his nights in a dark chamber known as *itima* (Akkadian *ki≈u*, "sanctum").⁴²⁴ A Sumerian Temple Hymn describes this subterranean chamber as follows:

⁴²¹ G. Cunningham, *Deliver Me from Evil: Mesopotamian Incantations, 2500-1500 BC* (Rome, 2007), p. 55.

⁴²² J. Black, A. George, & N. Postgate eds., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden, 2000), p. 166.

⁴²³ P. Steinkeller, "Of Stars and Men," in W. Moran & A. Giamto ed., *Biblical and Oriental Essays in Memory of William L. Moran* (Jerusalem, 2005), p. 18.

⁴²⁴ A. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (Leuven, 1992), p. 218.

“Dark cella, awe-inspiring place... Your interior is the place where the sun rises, endowed with abundance, far-reaching.”⁴²⁵

A subsequent passage from the same hymn emphasizes the cella’s darkness: “the cella is a mountain great, the house which knows no light is a mountain great.”⁴²⁶ As the “house which knows no light,” the itima offers a close parallel to the agrun as a “House of Darkness.”⁴²⁷

In order to bring additional clarity to the problem at hand, we would point to an Old Babylonian text that references a goddess Aya as being the bride of the ancient sun-god.⁴²⁸ According to fragmentary literary allusions, Aya was seemingly identified with the Underworld in which the ancient sun-god spent his nights.⁴²⁹ Christopher Woods offered the following summary of this otherwise obscure tradition: “Elsewhere, there is mention of a Mt. Buduhudug that carries the epithet *nereb* ^d*Šamaš* <ana> ^d*Aya* ‘the entrance of *Šamaš* to Aya,’ and so too must be a name for the mountain of sunset since it is upon his return to the Netherworld that the Sun-god is reunited each night with his spouse.”⁴³⁰

As Marvin Pope recognized, this tradition recalls an equally obscure passage from the Greek poet Mimnermos (circa 600 BCE), wherein the same goddess is linked to an underground chamber housing Helios. The archaic goddess Aya, in turn, naturally recalls the mythical island of Aiaia:

“It is interesting that Aja occurs in a fragment of the early Greek poet Mimnermos as a toponym for a place on the edge of the world-encircling sea (Okeanos) where the rays of the Sun (Helios) were kept in his chamber (*thalamos*)... This land is identical with Aiaia in the Odyssey and lies far away in the east.”⁴³¹

⁴²⁵ A. Sjöberg & E. Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns* (Locust Valley, 1969), p. 28.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴²⁷ E. Caplice, *La splendeur divine* (Paris, 1968), p. 302.

⁴²⁸ M. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (London, 2000), p. 407.

⁴²⁹ W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, 1998), p. 331, citing Urta XXII and Lipšur Type I 1:4.

⁴³⁰ C. Woods, “At the Edge of the World: Cosmological Conceptions of the Eastern Horizon in Mesopotamia,” *JANER* 9:2 (2009), p. 187, citing SB HhXXII. See also A. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, Vol. II* (Oxford, 2003), p. 863.

⁴³¹ M. Powell, “Aja~Eos,” *Studies in Honor of Åke Sjöberg* (1989), p. 455.

Mimnermos's report that Helios resided within a *thalamos*, in turn, recalls Euripides' statement that Clymene confined Phaethon within a *thalamos* after the latter's fiery death. Such overlapping traditions, coupled with the fact that Homer and Hesiod both describe Helios with the epithet *Phaethon*, confirm the likelihood that we are dealing with extremely archaic mythological themes here.

